Audience, Community and Dialogic Theatre:

Actors Touring Company and Ramin Gray 2010-2015

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Statement of Originality

I, Christine Hannah Twite, confirm that the research included within this thesis is my own work or that where it has been carried out in collaboration with, or supported by others, that this is duly acknowledged below and my contribution indicated. Previously published material is also acknowledged below.

I attest that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge break any UK law, infringe any third party's copyright or other Intellectual Property Right, or contain any confidential material.

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This work was funded by a collaborative doctoral award, which allowed me to work with Actors Touring Company to complete my research.

Abstract

This thesis is an analysis of the theatre work directed by Ramin Gray, Artistic Director of ATC (Actors Touring Company), from 2010 to 2015. It has been informed by my privileged position as ethnographer within the company as part of an AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award project. In the thesis, I argue that Gray's work explores questions of how we might negotiate living within contemporary, diverse communities, particularly in the light of recent scholarly critiques of community, and contemporary British debates about identity, migration, and community. The narratives and dramaturgies of ATC's productions during this period draw attention to what Chantal Mouffe has called the 'democratic paradox', whereby liberal drives towards inclusivity and plurality are held in tension with democratic drives towards unity and consensus.[1] Gray's work for ATC stages this paradox as politically productive, exposing it in all its discomfort, rather than as something to be repressed or eliminated. I use theoretical frameworks by Theodor Adorno, Maurice Blanchot, Chantal Mouffe, Jean-Luc Nancy and Richard Sennett, particularly Mouffe's 'agonistic democracy' and Sennett's concept of the 'dialogic', to support my account of how ATC's theatre has interrogated the concept of community.[2]

I examine three major productions where the tension between multiple voices and consensus has emerged in different ways, as Gray's relationship with the company has evolved. This evolution has been observed in rehearsal, in production, and through my access to company personnel, meetings and archives. The productions are: *The Golden Dragon* by Roland Schimmeplfennig; a double bill of *Crave* by Sarah Kane and *Illusions* by Ivan Viripaev; and *The Events* by David Greig.[3] I describe how ATC's dramaturgical structures make explicit a link between the paradox of the individual's relationship to the larger community and tensions pertaining to the role of the spectator in the larger theatre audience. In seeking to create this tension affectively within the body of the spectator, often creating unease or embarrassment, Gray's work foregrounds the paradox physically as well as intellectually, a practice which I argue is fundamental to his work for ATC.

This thesis suggests that contemporary debates around the term community are overlooked in much current scholarship on contemporary political theatre, and that theories of community can make a significant critical intervention in scholarship in this field. It offers a new exploration of the work that contemporary theatre and the theatre director can do to discuss, trouble and embody the concept of community.

[1] Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000).
[2] Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003); Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, trans. by Pierre Joris (Barrytown: Station Hill, 1983); Chantal Mouffe, 'Art and Democracy: Art as an Agonistic Intervention in Public Space', *Art and Research*, 1.2 (2007), 6–15; Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. by Peter Connor, trans. by Peter Connor and others (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Richard Sennett, *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation* (London: Penguin, 2013).
[3] Roland Schimmelpfennig, *The Golden Dragon*, trans. by David Tushingham (London: Oberon Books, 2011); Sarah Kane, *Sarah Kane: Complete Plays* (London: Methuen, 2001); Ivan Viripaev, *Illusions*, trans. by Cazimir Liske (London: Faber and Faber, 2012); David Greig, *The Events* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013).

Figure 1. The Audience and Stage Props, *The Golden Dragon*, Traverse (dir. Ramin Gray, 2011), Photo by Christine Twite.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to many people and institutions for helping me through my thesis research. Firstly, I am grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Council who granted this project a Collaborative Doctoral Award between Queen Mary University of London and Actors Touring Company that enabled this research to happen. The persuasive energy and drive of project instigators Bridget Escolme (my supervisor), Bijan Sheibani (former Artistic Director of Actors Touring Company) and Hannah Bentley (former Executive Director of Actors Touring Company) was enormously helpful at the start of my thesis. Indeed, the openness and enthusiasm of Actors Touring Company throughout my work has allowed me an unprecedented insight into their creative work and company management. I thank the members of the company, staff and actors, many of whom joined after I had begun my research: they could easily have felt uncomfortable under the scholarly gaze that they were subjected to, but remained open and supportive. Ramin Gray, former administrators Kendall O'Neill and Charelle Griffiths, former Executive Director Nick Williams, and current Company Manager Jess Banks have all provided comprehensive support. The vigour and liveliness of the drama department at Queen Mary is unstoppable: I have gained insight and inspiration from my fellow PhD candidates, the BA students I have taught and all the staff of the drama department. Without the Queen Mary Drapers Company Hardship Fund grant I could not have continued my studies. Thank you also to the photographers named below, who have all given me permission to use their images in this thesis.

Personally, I would like thank my wonderful parents Carol and Stewart Twite and my sister Julie Twite for believing in me throughout this process. Without the tireless support of Eric Lacey and Alicia Rix I could not have undertaken this journey. Finally, my deepest thanks to my supervisor Bridget Escolme whose drive, endless positivity and professionalism enabled me to complete this project. This thesis is dedicated to Cazimir Liske, 1982 – 2017.

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List of Abbreviations

ACE	Arts Council England
ACGB	Arts Council of Great Britain
AD	Artistic Director
AHRC	Arts and Humanities Research Council
ATC	Actors Touring Company
CDA	Collaborative Doctoral Award
Crave/*Illusions*	2012 ATC dual production of *Crave* and *Illusions*
Dragon	2011 ATC production of *The Golden Dragon*
EU	European Union
FOH	Front of House
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
PhD	Philosophiae doctor / Doctor of Philosophy
QMUL	Queen Mary University of London

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Introduction

Figure 2. Rudi Dharmalingam as The Boy leads the choir, *The Events*, The Young Vic (dir. Ramin Gray, 2013), Photo by Stephen Cummiskey.

Sing-Along with *The Events*

As I sit in the audience at the Young Vic on a cold night in October 2015, words are projected as surtitles above the stage. A character named only as The Boy holds a microphone tightly, stands central and tall, and begins to sing these lyrics. He dominates the stage, moving across it with the ease of a rock star like Bob Geldof. He sings *to* the audience, looking directly at them, strutting around the stage. A choir of around twenty-five participants behind him sing along in harmony and move to the rhythm. (The choir are an amateur local choir, and had earlier appeared singing an upbeat gospel hymn to much applause from the audience). The Boy shouts and encourages the

audience to sing along with him. He begins to clap his hands and the choir copy – some of the audience members also begin to clap along. There is an onstage pianist who accompanies The Boy, and I watch as the pianist also becomes more and more invested in the music, rocking side-to-side on the piano stool and playing louder and louder. The song ends in a final crescendo and The Boy collapses on the ground in a fit of exhaustion and jubilation.

The atmosphere in the auditorium has changed radically from the play's opening moments: the whole experience is now more reminiscent of a rock concert or a comedy gig rather than the sedate theatre piece the audience members seemed to expect. Popular Western comedians and singers frequently encourage interaction between the audience and themselves, building up a rapport of communality, a sense of connection though shared laughter or music.[4] Up until now most of the audience had remained still and silent as post-naturalistic theatre conventions dictate. Now many are singing and clapping. As an audience member, I felt the pull of The Boy's singing, encouraging me to sing along and join the group, and celebrate the complicity and involvement this created.

This remains for me the most memorable point of any of the Actors Touring Company (ATC) performances I attended, not because of this carefully curated sense of conviviality, but because the lyrics of the song which The Boy was singing were as follows:

> By the time he was my age Jesus had founded a new religion.
>
> By the time he was my age Bob Geldof had saved Africa.
>
> By the time he was my age Gavrilo Princip has fired the shot that started World War One.

[4] Gillian Hendry, Sally Wiggins, and Tony Anderson, 'Constructing Cohesion through Laughter', in *Independent in the Heard: Inclusion and Exclusion as Social Processes* (Linköping University: Linköping University, 2014), CXXI, 1–16.

If I'm going to make a mark on the world I have to do it now! [5]

The examples which The Boy uses in his song move from the sublime to the horrific. The first is a simple celebration of the work of Jesus Christ (and, in the performance I watched above, echoed the gospel praise song which the choir had earlier chosen to sing to great audience applause). The second line takes a bathetic dip; Bob Geldof is known for his support of charity work in Africa, and as the founder of Live Aid, but these good works have been eclipsed by reports of his arrogance and 'Saintly' or Christ-like self-image. [6] Here it becomes clear that The Boy wishes to emulate the *stardom* of Geldof rather than his good works, a fame which The Boy does not seem to connect with arrogance or egoism. Finally, he sings about Gavrilo Princip, who is known to most as the person who, through his assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife, precipitated events which led to the First World War, which caused around 37 million casualties worldwide. The song that The Boy sings now is revealed as a paean to individualism and celebrates his narcissism – he wants to be different, notorious, not part of a group but marked out by his exceptionality. This notoriety will be achieved through good works or through murder, he is indifferent to which. Here the dramatic irony is at its height - the spectator is encouraged to realise the potential political and social consequences of this song, whilst The Boy seems indifferent or in ignorance of this.

At the song's opening I begin to sing along as all the social and onstage signs were directing me to: the projected subtitles, The Boy's encouraging behaviour and the whole onstage choir who are also singing. As the song progresses I gradually realise that the lyrics which The Boy is singing are indefensible, troubling, and reminiscent of jingoistic propaganda. However, despite my recognition of the dramatic irony, I simultaneously feel an overwhelming pressure to continue singing: stopping singing felt curmudgeonly and anti-social, an act rejecting the people on stage rather than the ideas

[5] Greig, *The Events*, p. 49.
[6] John Hilary, 'The Arrogance of Saint Bob', *Guardian*, 5 April 2010 <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/apr/05/geldof-arrogance-poverty-agenda-starsuckers> [accessed 2 May 2018].

within the song. I am aware that by singing along and becoming part of the group I am ironically supporting The Boy's individualism, yet by stopping singing I am projecting my own individuality, paradoxically both rejecting The Boy's calls to sing whilst performing the individualism which The Boy is celebrating.

I felt a sense of cognitive dissonance again and again watching Ramin Gray's productions for Actors Touring Company (ATC), but that moment during *The Events* best exemplifies this affect. This example shows the stark difference produced between my intellectual understanding of the moment (that the song was clearly wrong) and my social and instinctual understanding of the moment (I felt compelled to join in and confirm myself as part of the group or larger community, to 'perform' in the right way). The phenomenology of my reactions to this moment parallels the questions raised in all of Gray's productions for ATC, which each explore questions about how we might live in cosmopolitan diverse communities in the contemporary UK. Community, in Gray's theatre, is inherently paradoxical. In the theatre that I examine here, communities with one fixed, homogenous identity, and communities where everyone acts according to their own interests with no interactions, are both staged as problematic. Gray's productions not only encourage meditation on the theme of community but actively show the complexities of negotiating dynamics between being part of a group (the body politic, perhaps) whilst maintaining and respecting individuality *within the body of the spectator*. In the moment I describe, I had to actively decide whether to continue to sing or to stop: neither option was 'correct', nor could I avoid this question. In this thesis, I argue that Gray's theatre performs this dissonance between self and group as essential to the creation of functional contemporary communities.

This thesis considers how the work of director Gray developed at ATC from 2010 to 2015, with particular emphasis on the way his productions have functioned to explore and critique ideas of community as articulated in contemporary public discourses within Britain and Europe, often through dramaturgy developed to engage audiences affectively as well as intellectually. I want to particularly highlight three elements key to understanding Gray's work at ATC: the audience, recent

theories of community, and finally, taken together, Sennett's conception of dialogic thought, Mouffe's 'agonistic democracy' and a range of critical theories of community discussed below.[7]

Audience

I focus on audience because Gray's work constantly foregrounds the spectator's presence and encourages the spectator to be self-conscious about his or her reactions in relation to the larger audience. The potential of the theatre audience to act as a temporary community has been recognised by Tim Etchells, who has suggested that when

> [w]atching the best theatre and performance we are together and alone. Together in the sense that we're aware of the temporary and shifting bonds that link us to both the stage and to our fellow watchers, plugged into the group around and in front of us, the communal situation, sensing laughter, attentiveness, tension or unease that grips us collectively, in waves and ripples, in jolts, jumps and uncertain spirals or in other formations that do not yet have a name. Sat watching we spread-out, osmose, make connections. But at the same time, even as we do so, we feel our separateness, our difference from those around us, from those on-stage. Even as we shift and flow within the group, we're aware that our place in its emerging consensus, in temporary community, is partial and provisional – that in any case the group itself – there in the theatre, as elsewhere, in our cities and streets, in the relations between nations, peoples and states – is always as much a fraught and necessary question, a longing and a problem, as it is any kind of certainty.[8]

[7] Sennett; Mouffe, 'Art and Democracy'; Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*.
[8] *Programme Notes: Case Studies for Locating Experimental Theatre*, ed. by Daniel Brine and Lois Keidan (London: Live Art Development Agency, 2007), p. 26.

Etchells depicts the simultaneous ability to feel both 'separateness' and 'community' when one watches a performance and emphasises the partial and fragile nature of the community created by participation in the theatre event. This tension, he argues, is irresolvable, and reflects the larger experience of the self within community: a 'longing', a 'problem' and a 'fraught and necessary question'. Gray's work for ATC characteristically accentuates this tension in the theatre audience. In what follows, I examine three major productions where this tension emerges in different ways as ATC's work evolved under Gray's direction: *The Golden Dragon* by Roland Schimmeplfennig (July 2011 to March 2012); a double bill of *Crave* by Sarah Kane (March 2012 to May 2012) and *Illusions* by Ivan Viripaev (April 2012 to July 2012, and November 2012 to February 2013); and finally *The Events* by David Greig (July 2013 to November 2013 then revived March 2014 to October 2014, January 2015 to March 2015 and September 2015 to November 2015).[9] Etchells implicitly links the tensions within the role of the theatre audience with those of the individual in society, and I will argue that ATC's work makes this connection explicit.

The uneasy relationship between self and group is already manifested in the words used to describe theatre reception. We speak of an *audience*: a homogenous body of people simultaneously engaged in watching (and in particular, listening), or a *spectator*: a singular, separate, specific person who is engaged in watching (and in particular, looking). Neither term allows for the changing relationship between self and group, shifts in consensus, dissent or disagreement, within an audience. The terms construct a false dichotomy between unity and detachment, meaning that the act of writing or speaking about the complexities of reception in theatre is already hampered by a semantic constriction.[10] This false dichotomy has been reinscribed by the ways that theatre audiences have historically been researched by academics and practitioners. In a chapter headed 'Spectators and Audiences' Christopher Balme surveys the work in theatre studies in this area, and

[9] For a full list of the dates and locations of these productions, please see www.atctheatre.com/productions/past.

[10] For the sake of clarity, I have chosen to use the term 'audience' in this thesis when talking about reception, referring to the physical group of people who attend a performance – not to suggest any homogeneity in their responses.

states that 'we can say that most research to date has concentrated on (a) the individualized, actual recipient; (b) the hypothetical recipient; and (c) on the macro-aspect of audiences as collective groups'.[11] My research in this thesis is not an attempt to understand or speak for the plethora of audience experiences and interests. Instead I suggest that this false dichotomy is imperative to understanding ATC and Gray's work.

Community

In considering why the tension between collective and individual experience in the theatre might be productive, the second of my touchstones emerges: the theme and theory of community. In ATC's work with Ramin Gray, the relationship between spectator-as-individual and audience-as-community is foregrounded in order to ask questions about contemporary communities in the UK. The narratives of Gray's productions focus on community relations in an increasingly diverse Western populace in the neoliberal present, particularly in terms of ethnicity, income, education, culture and age. Characters in the plays examined here are often presented as coming from a white middle-class, Western, liberal elite background and are faced with questions of how to negotiate a relationship with cultural Others. In the case of *The Golden Dragon* and *The Events*, there are obvious portrayals of the Other in the Asian immigrants and a far-right extremist respectively. However, relationships between people who are ethnically similar, or have more unified cultural backgrounds, are investigated too, most notably in the dual production of *Crave* and *Illusions*, which both stage the impossibility of fully understanding another person at all, and suggest that understanding this is ironically key to a better of understanding the Other. The plays' narratives often emphasise the ideological differences between individuals and their communities, and use this

[11] Christopher B Balme, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 36.

as a starting point to develop ideas of relationality that allow for difference within the community rather than fruitlessly seeking to erase it.

I suggested above that Gray's theatre draws attention to the often uncomfortable relationship between the spectator and the wider audience as a parallel to the relationship between the self and the community. In Chapter One, 'Community', I chart the main contemporary philosophical and political discussions around the term community which relate to Gray's work. In particular, I focus on the critical theory produced during and after the fall of the Berlin wall at the end of the 1980s and the perceived failure of Communism. Raymond Williams foreshadowed this interest in community in his earlier 1976 work *Keywords*, where he states that 'unlike all other terms of social organization (state, nation, society, etc.) [community] seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term'.[12] The word has no Other to be defined against; it sits as a blanket descriptive word to present an idea of unity and togetherness but side-steps the issue of the exclusivity and exclusion implicit in the term.[13] The elasticity and false benignancy of the term served as a basis for the critiques of a wealth of theorists who began to reassess the idea of community as a universal positive. Williams' sense that the term community erases any opposite is reapplied to expose the way in which actual communities might erase dissent within their own ranks, and reject outsiders as Others.

Chapter One explores these ideas, in particular how theorists have explored the tensions inherent in the concept of community in relation to the neoliberal age of globalisation, migration and mass media. I also draw on recent use of the term 'community' by the British government to demonstrate how the tension between union and difference is played out in recent political rhetoric. I consider work by Jean-Luc Nancy, Maurice Blanchot, Theodor Adorno, Giorgio Agamben, Zygmunt Bauman, Jürgen Habermas and Miranda Joseph, each of whom challenge the idea of community as an essentialist and monolithic structure, but raise different possibilities as to how we might

[12] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 66.
[13] Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, p. 66.

redevelop the term for the contemporary moment.[14] Each theorist offers useful structures to re-define community in the post-modern world. For example, Nancy's sense of the 'inoperative community' based on 'being-the-one-with-the-other' defines community through ineffable relationality and not through structure.[15] Agamben's 'coming community', structured around his belief in the inability for even the self to be an example of coherent wholeness, replaces community as unity with community as belonging.[16] Blanchot's work is accepting and understanding of the human desire for a sense of unified community, but marks the importance that this is unobtainable and instead posits a community based on 'sharing and mutual care'.[17]

Drawing on these theories, I explore how Gray and ATC's productions each approach the complexities of the term and idea of community, in particular the difficult negotiation between self, Other and group in the creation of any kind of community. The dramaturgy of each production is created to embody this negotiation in the spectator, and the spectator's relationship with self, Other and group.

Dialogic Thought and Agonistic Democracy

In drawing attention to the complexities of community in the contemporary moment, I also use some more concrete conceptions about how a community based on relationality rather than unity might work. These concepts are useful in considering why Gray's positioning of spectators into socially uncomfortable scenarios might be politically productive.

[14] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*; Blanchot; Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*; Zygmunt Bauman, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); Jürgen Habermas, *Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, ed. by Pablo De Greiff, trans. by Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002); Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).
[15] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. xxxix.
[16] Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. by Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
[17] Bauman, *Community*, pp. 149–50.

Richard Sennett uses the conception of dialogic thought to theorise how contemporary community might work: for Sennett, community is a continuing dialogue and encounter between different people who empathise with each other, who listen to each other, and continually learn about the disagreements between them. These interactions do not create an ultimate unity of opinion; instead it is interaction itself that constitutes the positive workings of community. A former professional musician, Sennett connects this idea with the interaction of a string quartet in performance: all four musicians are playing different music, but need to listen and respond to each other at all times to maintain the coherence of the piece.[18] This concept of the dialogic helpfully describes the openness to debate, along with the importance of listening and witnessing, which is a theme that appears in all of Gray's work.

Chantal Mouffe's concept of agonistic democracy is based on her conception of the democratic paradox, rather than specifically addressing the concept of community, but nevertheless works to theorise both society at large and community. In her 2000 monograph *The Democratic Paradox* she explains that

> We are dealing with a new political form of society whose specificity comes from the articulation between two different traditions. On one side we have the liberal tradition constituted by the rule of law, the defence of human rights and the respect of individual liberty; on the other the democratic tradition whose main ideas are those of equality, identity between governing and governed and popular sovereignty. There is no necessary relation between those two distinct traditions but only a contingent historical articulation.[19]

[18] Sennett, p. 18.
[19] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, pp. 2–3.

Mouffe sees an inescapable tension at the heart of the contemporary Left: between the ideology of *libertarianism*, which defends the self and the 'individual', and the ideology of *democracy,* which focuses on group 'equality' and works with the 'popular' opinion.[20] This directly parallels the tension between self and group articulated in community theory.

Audience, community and dialogic thought / agonistic democracy each inform this thesis and its analysis of the work that Gray and ATC undertook between 2010 and 2015. Gray's work in the rehearsal room, in the company management of ATC, and as evidenced in the final productions, all provide forums for and examples of the productive agonism, debate, and disagreement articulated in Mouffe's concept of agonistic democracy and Sennett's dialogic thought. Rather than providing a simple solution to 'fix' contemporary communities, the work of ATC, in the period under examination, offers its audiences a forum for intellectual discussion and affectual experience to explore the complexities of the negotiation between the individual and the wider community. I will argue that this dynamic, and the audience's potential consciousness of it, offers an example of the mutable agonistic democracy / dialogic interaction and champions the importance of an open, flexible approach to community outside of theatre.

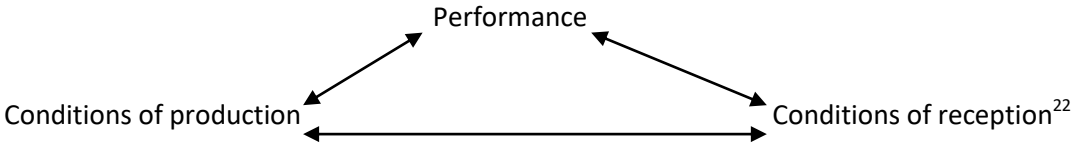
Methodology

This project was sponsored by a Collaborative Doctoral Award from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, which supported the collaboration between Queen Mary University of London and ATC. These awards promote academic collaboration between higher education institutions, and non-academic arts and humanities organisations and businesses. As a CDA student, I was able to develop my research interests through my growing relationship with ATC. I was given unrivalled access to ATC's archive, rehearsal processes, planning for productions, performances and education

[20] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 2.

and participation work. The project framework devised by ATC and the Department of Drama, QMUL, was explicitly formed to explore the company through a holistic understanding of production and reception. Ric Knowles' methodology for such a reading of the theatrical process in *Reading the Material Theatre* was a useful touchstone.[21] He develops

> [...] a mode of performance analysis that takes into account the immediate conditions, both cultural and theatrical, in and through which theatrical performances are produced on the one hand, and received, on the other. It understands *meaning* to be produced in the theatre as a negotiation at the intersection of three shifting and mutually constitutive poles:



[22]

The production of 'meaning' is a constant negotiation between these three points, and within this thesis the variety of research on each of the points will also be coloured by my own biases, interests, and the (often serendipitous) conversations and interactions with the cast, creative team, company employees and audience members.[23] The 'meanings' I produce in this thesis will inevitably be in part partial and subjective, although I hope that in drawing attention to this fact I will encourage further academic discussion and research: academia, after all, is another iteration of Mouffe's agonistic space, in which debate and disagreement are part of development.

[21] Ric Knowles, *Reading the Material Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
[22] Knowles, *Reading the Material Theatre*, p. 3.
[23] Knowles, *Reading the Material Theatre*, p. 9.

For each point of Knowles' triangle a different methodology was called for, to reflect the complexities of the research. As a member of ATC for five years, as their 'in-house' researcher, I was able to study the conditions of production in depth. This included working in the office of ATC one day per week in the first years; being part of the company decision making process and 'away days'; attending rehearsals for every production; and even living with the creative teams for a period when on tour. My research on the company's 'conditions of production' is informed by the process and theory of ethnography, which I outline below. The second triangle point - the productions themselves – I researched through watching several iterations of the productions at different times and different locations, and reading the Stage Manager's show report each day. Following Knowles' title, my 'readings' of the 'material theatre' produced by ATC are thus both semiotic and cultural materialist: I read each work as a performance text; I read it in the cultural context that produces it. In exploring the final triangle point, I undertook some small-scale research into audience reception and this was informed by thinking around the phenomenology of reception.

Conditions of Production: Performance Ethnography

This thesis should be read first and foremost as an ethnographic account of the work of director Ramin Gray at ATC: but my emphasis on the way his productions have functioned to explore and critique ideas of community as articulated in contemporary public discourses within Britain and Europe grew from my position and research as ethnographer. Ethnographic analysis has only recently been embraced as a particularly important methodology in performance studies. In Gay McAuley's 2012 seminal book *Not Magic but Work* she notes that

> [...] as I observed more and more rehearsals it became clear that the critical apparatus provided by theatre studies [...] was insufficient when attempting to deal with the complex interpersonal relations, work practices and the collective creative process involved in rehearsal. [...] I found that in the debates that had occurred in ethnography a decade earlier the most nuanced discussion [of these kind of complexities].[24]

McAuley expropriates ethnography from its former reputed status as simplistically colonialist, and considers the complexities of embarking on this kind of research.[25] Like McAuley, I find ethnographic theory perfectly suited to help frame analyses of the rehearsal room, and indeed in my work within the other areas of the company. I take particular inspiration from the manifesto published in the first edition of the journal *Ethnography* in 2000, which aims to chart the contemporary reassessment of the merits and uses of ethnography.[26] Coining the acronym TIME, standing for a 'theoretically informed medium for ethnography', the journal publishes critical thinking about how the *process* of ethnographical research works, as well as the *analysis* of collected data. The relationship between researcher and institution or place of research has been re-defined in this school of thinking within a post-positivist framework. Rather than considering the researcher as impartial and objective, it is recognised that the researcher's own background, interests, and the different relationships formed within the process, effect the research produced. For example, my background in arts management and education, my previous knowledge of the work of ATC, my enthusiasm for European theatre and even the specific rehearsals and company meetings which I happened to attend have no doubt inflected my own approaches to the company's work, and as such my work should always be considered partial and inflected by these interests.

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[24] Gay McAuley, *Not Magic But Work: An Ethnographic Account of a Rehearsal Process* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), pp. 4, 7.

[25] For a critique of the neo-colonialist intentions in the methodology of ethnography see: James Clifford and George E. Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (London: University of California Press, 1986).

[26] Paul Willis and Mats Trondman, 'Manifesto for Ethnography', *Ethnography*, 1.1 (2000), 5–16.

Georgina Born depicts the ethnographer as both an observer and a participant during research.[27] Therefore, the ethnographic researcher herself is another reiteration of the complexities of being simultaneously part of a community whilst retaining individual distinction. In performing as an ethnographic researcher, I parallel the conditions of the theatre spectator: I am conscious of my role as spectator whilst at the same time I am a part of different communities – the rehearsal room, the theatre audience, and the larger body of the ATC company (in one of my first meetings I was given an ATC badge to wear at all events, clearly marking me out as part of the ATC team). An audience member myself, I was able to watch as ATC went through the process of applying for funding and putting together a new artistic campaign to ensure a positive reception from both ACE, the money-givers, and their future audiences. The ethnographer's dual position as observer-participant allows for implicit understanding and knowledge, and access to the complexities and material realities of making theatre.

My work with ATC was long-term – I worked with the company for five years - allowing me to develop understandings and relationships around the kinds of work produced by the company. As Georgina Born has argued, ethnography is both *deductive* (using background theoretical and substantive knowledge) and *inductive* (deriving concepts and analysis from empirical fieldwork).[28] The oscillation between deductive research, which tests theories, and inductive research, which develops theory from data, allows for empirical research to amend, develop, and progress. Ethnographic methodology is also useful for charting dissensus, allowing the scholar to approach differences in opinions and account for them, without simply trying to create a unified homogenous understanding of the group under examination and this parallels my interest in the way recent theorists have deconstructed the concept of communities as organic wholes.

[27] Georgina Born, *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC* (London: Random House, 2004), p. 32.
[28] Born.

Ethnographic analysis has also been productive in that it offers an alternative to the common practice of describing the director and writer as the primary producer of meaning in performance. Although Ramin Gray's name appears within this thesis title, he is only one element of how ATC's work was produced. As I note in the next chapters, his rehearsal room was created as an agonistic space where ideas were constantly debated, and indeed Gray encouraged the actors to continue to experiment and try different approaches through the run of the productions. As artistic director, Gray did make final decisions, along with the executive director, about marketing, casting and the overall direction which the company would take, but as ethnographer I was able to watch and engage as issues of funding, branding and company history played important roles in company decision making.

Performance: Semiotics, Phenomenology, Cultural Materialism

In my accounts of the performances themselves I use text and performance analysis, influenced by both semiotics and phenomenology. Like Knowles and the theatre semioticians before him, instead of understanding each production simply through the dramatic text, I 'read' the whole *mise-en-scène* as a 'performance text'.[29] Also like Knowles, my semiotic readings are informed by an awareness of the conditions in which these textual meanings are produced. I focus the different potential 'readings' of each production through my knowledge of the rehearsal room, conversations with the actors and creative staff, and my own experiences of watching the productions. I make phenomenological readings of the ATC productions, explaining how techniques have been developed to produce particular feelings or emotions within the spectator.[30] Here I make no major distinction between the intellectual and the emotional response of a spectator, as these two

[29] Knowles, *Reading the Material Theatre*, p. 16.
[30] In particular, semiotic analysis of theatre popular in the 1980s and 1990s emphasised a gap between production and reception. See for example: Patrice Pavis, 'Production and Reception in the Theatre', in *New Directions in Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993), pp. 25–71.

reactions are interlinked and interdependent. Erika Fischer-Lichte and Peggy Phelan's work on the phenomenology of the spectator spearheaded the work on affect in audience studies, and asks how spectator affect might be recorded and understood.[31] In this thesis, my interest is in how a director and artistic team aim to *create* semiotic codes and phenomenological responses in the spectator, rather than to define exactly how each audience member might experience a performance.

Undertaking a systematic review of audience reception was beyond the scope of this thesis.[32] My interest lies in the way ATC's dramaturgies were constructed to *produce* unconscious and subtle reactions in the audience, rather than capturing a wealth of audience data.[33] In this thesis I will necessarily address a range of different responses to ATC's performances to get a sense of how the work was received, using critics, reviewers, bloggers, responses on Facebook and Twitter, but I do not offer an overall survey of audience reception. My interest is in the production of (potential) meaning rather than in developing a comprehensive analysis of how the productions were received. At all times, I try to avoid 'the risk of [...] positing an ideal spectator', as Helen Grehan calls it, as, after all, Ramin Gray's work deliberately creates multiple spectatorial positions and foregrounds the tensions between them.[34]

In my examination of the conditions of reception of ATC's work, I recognise that my project is indebted to a historically informed cultural materialism. By cultural materialism, I mean the kinds of scholarship originally championed by Raymond Williams, which recognise the significance of the

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[31] See for example: Erika Fischer-Lichte and Jo Riley, *The Show and the Gaze of Theatre: A European Perspective* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997); Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993).

[32] Knowles, *Reading the Material Theatre*, p. 10.

[33] This is not to say that audience research cannot reveal subtleties of audience reaction when conditions are right. The large project led by Janelle Reinelt allowed a consideration of audience reception at the theatre over time and place, made possible by a large AHRC grant and a number of different practitioners employed on the project. Penelope Woods' recent PhD thesis focused on Shakespeare's Globe, and the single local of research allowed her to enlist a dedicated team of trained volunteers to help amass data from the audiences. Please see: Janelle Reinelt and others, *Critical Mass: Theatre Spectatorship and Value Attribution* (London: Arts and Humanities Research Council, 2014); Penelope Woods, 'Globe Audiences: Spectatorship and Reconstruction at Shakespeare's Globe' (Queen Mary, University of London, 2011).

[34] Helena Grehan, *Performance, Ethics and Spectatorship in a Global Age* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 5.

material conditions of production in the creation of culture and art.[35] The particular political and social conditions of Britain between 2011 and 2015 are key to understanding the kinds of work which ATC produces during it, and my involvement with the company allowed me to see at first-hand how the company reacted and responded to changes such as government and funding. As Knowles suggests, part of this project involves 'historicizing the here and now'.[36]

Finally, I suggest that this thesis, in its holistic understanding of the works produced by one theatre company over time, is part of a larger recent move in the academy to explore in detail the work of smaller-scale theatre companies and their outputs. There is still a marked tendency to focus on writers as a locus of academic enquiry, or to look to larger venue-based national theatres as an object of study, theatres with readily available and well-funded archives.[37] However, in the last few years a number of works have been published to address the 'lacuna' that Liz Tomlin points to, in research documenting smaller theatre companies, research which 'provide[s] a clear chronological and contextual account of the overall developments of these [theatre companies] ... and how funding policies and shifts of cultural agendas changed their evolution'.[38] Most notable is Bloomsbury's *British Theatre Companies* series which does exceptional work documenting companies between 1965 and 2014.[39] Patrick Duggan and Victor Ukaegbu's *Reverberations Across Small-Scale British Theatre* also makes a significant contribution; it considers these companies in the

[35] For a review of Williams' method, please see: Raymond Williams, *Culture and Materialism: Selected Essays* (London: Verso, 2005).
[36] Knowles, *Reading the Material Theatre*, p. 13.
[37] See for example recent journal special issues based on playwrights and recent publications: David Barnett, 'Simon Stephens: British Playwright in Dialogue with Europe', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 26.3 (2016), 305–10; L. Goddard, *Contemporary Black British Playwrights: Margins to Mainstream* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Daniel Rosenthal, *The National Theatre Story* (London: Oberon Books, 2012); Colin Chambers, *Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company: Creativity and the Institution* (London: Routledge, 2008).
[38] Liz Tomlin, *British Theatre Companies: 1995-2014* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. vii.
[39] John Bull and Graham Saunders, *British Theatre Companies: 1965-1979* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); Graham Saunders, *British Theatre Companies: 1980-1994* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); Tomlin.

light of what it means to be British, and provides a variety of interviews and contextual evidence.[40] My thesis contributes to this emerging field.

The Chapters

In Chapter One I explain in more detail the recent theoretical debates about community, which inform the thesis as a whole. My original PhD proposal focused on the success of ATC in attracting new audiences to its work: young, black British audiences in particular. After I joined ATC Sheibani announced his resignation and Gray instead became Artistic Director. Gray changed the focus of the company and radically changed its outreach programme. This meant for a change of focus in the thesis, and I describe this in detail Chapter Two. Alongside this change, the company were applying to be funded as part of Art Council England's new National Portfolio Scheme, which allowed me unrivalled access and dialogue about the companies past work, future plans and development hopes. I use this change as a starting point to consider the theatre Gray produces in relation to Sheibani's work, and apply the insight I gained through being present during this change.

Chapter Three is a case-study of *The Golden Dragon* by Roland Schimmelpfennig. The characters of the play are stark representations of post-modern alienation; most of the characters are only able to respond to the Other in monetary or sexual terms. I read these characters as examples of Bauman's alienated post-modern subject, unable to maintain healthy relationships with the Other. The post-modern cosmopolitan subject lives in close proximity to the Other, but is ironically unable to communicate with them. This lack of community serves to enhance the disparity between the experiences of the wealthy educated Westerners and the illegal Eastern immigrants in the play. I suggest that Gray's production uses dramaturgical techniques indebted to Brecht, which emphasise to the audience that no one perspective can ever be completely authoritative. Instead,

[40] Patrick Duggan and Victor Ukaegbu, *Reverberations Across Small-Scale British Theatre: Politics, Aesthetics and Forms* (Bristol: Intellect, 2013).

the audience are encouraged to consider of the ethical importance of considering the Other from many different perspectives, in order that no one image (or spectacle, in the words of Debord) an creates an erroneous depiction of the Other. The spectators in this production, as in all Gray's work for ATC, are positioned to be self-conscious about the way they have looked at or seen things through one perspective. The production literally and metaphorically shows different perspectives on the narrative, which sees a Chinese immigrant die from blood loss from botched back-street surgery. Whilst the ethical importance of looking twice and actively thinking about the Other is encouraged, the play and Gray's production suggest that complete intersubjectivity can never be achieved. The actors all play against type, physically showing the difficulty of inhabiting another person's perspective. Using Debord's idea of the spectacle, I consider how the play encourages the spectator to see differently, to overcome the illusion of the one-dimensional spectacle and think more about the different lives of those around them - although, as in Lévinas' conception of the inscrutable Other, complete intersubjectivity is shown to be impossible.[41] Productive community suggested in *The Golden Dragon* is that in which each individual understands the unbridgeable differences with the Other, but uses this knowledge to debate and examine with the Other.

Chapter Four explores ATC's double bill of Sarah Kane's *Crave* and Ivan Viripaev's *Illusions*. This dual production centres on domestic settings where, unlike in *The Golden Dragon*, the characters or voices desperately search and 'crave' for an intersubjective union with the Other. Both plays portray the desire for this kind of unity, which I connect with Bauman's description of the desire for security and safety through the romanticised notion of a united community. Tragedy occurs in both plays in this dual production, because the characters do not understand that unity with the Other will always be unobtainable, and instead obsessively seek it out. This obsession I connect to Aristophanes' myth of the split being, desperately seeking their literal other half.

[41] Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Eastbourne: Soul Bay Press, 2012); Emmanuel Lévinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. by Philippe Nemo (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985).

As in *The Golden Dragon*, this double bill uses dramaturgical techniques to unsettle the audience and encourage them to be self-conscious about their own desire for unity and closure in their understanding of the narratives. *Crave* is written and performed in such a way as to hint there is a coherent meaning but it leaves the audience in at state of uncertainty at its end. In *Illusions,* the narrator-characters gradually reveal themselves to be untrustworthy and manipulative, positioning the spectator in an uncomfortable position whereby the 'truth' of the narrative cannot be certain. This discomfort is enhanced by the fact that the audience are seated on stage and sharing the light with the performers during *Illusions*: they are positioned to be self-conscious about how and when they react to the narrative even before the narrator-characters reveal that they are manipulating the account. This unease, I argue, is ethically productive in comparable ways to the unease created in the audience of *The Golden Dragon*. Because the desire to fully know the Other is futile and leads to tragedy in this dual production, the audience are invited to consider instead the importance of recognising this fact. Empathetic attention to the Other is not discouraged, but understanding the inevitability of disagreement and difference is seen as important in building productive and meaningful relationships. Relationality based in difference is the touchstone of the community theorisations of Nancy, Blanchot and Agamben, and *Crave* and *Illusions* demonstrate the productivity of such interactions.

Chapter Five is the final case-study, which focuses on *The Events* by David Greig. The play follows Claire, a vicar who is recovering from a terrorist attack on her community choir. In trying to come to terms with the tragedy she obsessively questions everyone connected with The Boy who committed the crime. She intends to take revenge on The Boy for his actions, but her final face-to-face encounter with him demonstrates that he is either a villain to take revenge upon or a victim who she should forgive. She reaches no final understanding about the nature of The Boy and his actions: instead, it is her realisation that she can never fully understand The Boy which leads to her ability to move on from the attack and start her life again. The play and Gray's production advocates

the kind of dialogic, antagonistic encounters that occur between Claire and the people she interviews about the attacker, as in Sennett and Mouffe's depiction of such relationalities.

Lastly, I draw together my conclusions about Gray's work with ATC and its concern with creating productive tensions within and about the 'community' that is the audience. I argue that community theory is a useful and overlooked resource when writing about contemporary theatre, and that the debates the theory raises are pertinent to discussions around theatre and relationality, in particular the individual's relationship with society and the political sphere. Responding to these theories, I use Mouffe's idea of the antagonistic, and Sennett's conception of the dialogic, to explain the forms of interaction which Gray and ATC's work of the period 2010 to 2015 presents as productive and ethically positive. This antagonistic, dialogic relationality is used by Gray in his production themes and dramaturgy, in the rehearsal room, and in his company management.

Chapter One: Community

The Problem of Community

In this chapter, I outline the theoretical context for my readings of ATC's work, focussing on the critical reappraisal of the concept of community during the second half of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century. I survey six main critical approaches: Nancy and Blanchot's critique of community in the light of Adorno's 'negative dialectics'; Lévinas and Agamben's conception of community, ethics, identity and the Other; Joseph and Bauman's discussions of community and utopia; Habermas and Sennett's 'dialogic community'; and Rancière and Bishop's discussions of community, audience and relational aesthetics. Finally, I bring this theoretical work into dialogue with ideas about community circulating in contemporary performance and theatre studies, and contemporary British politics.

Raymond Williams' analysis of the term community in his *Keywords* in 1976 prefigures a key concern for the theorists of community that follow him. He suggests that

> The complexity of community [...] relates to the difficult interaction between the tendencies originally distinguished in the historical development: on the one hand the sense of direct common concern; on the other hand the materialization of various forms of common organization, which may not adequately express this. Community can be the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships. What is most important, perhaps, is that

> unlike all other terms of social organization (state, nation, society, etc.) it seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term.[42]

In his morphological examination of community, William uncannily foresees the political explorations of the term to come. He points out that there is no 'opposing' term, no Other to be understood in relation to community, unlike alternative common words for large groups of people. Within the term is a morphological erasure of the Other: the term renders the Other's existence invisible. In calling community the 'warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative', the term is both itself and its opposite: it has the potential to be both the 'existing' relationships and the 'alternative'. What Williams' definition of community shares with the following theories is a rejection of essentialist ideas of community as fixed and unchanging, and the desire to expose the contradictions in this essentialism. The complexities of these arguments are crucial to my analysis of the way Gray's productions critique, question and expose the idea of community in the contemporary UK.

The critical trend to deconstruct and explore the idea of community began at a time during which Europe itself was involved in a debate about what the 'European Community', leading to the Maastricht Treaty in 1993. Alongside this, during the 1980s, the USSR implemented Perestroika, a series of social and economic reforms by leader Gorbachev to stabilise the struggling communist union and ease relations within the disparate states and the West (ultimately leading to the fall of the USSR in 1989). What community might mean in the contemporary world became not just a philosophical question but a concrete one, discussed in the public sphere. Interrogations of the notion of community seem to parallel such world episodes, and in the current climate of political populism remain important and ever-present.

[42] Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, p. 66.

Nancy, Blanchot, Arendt and Adorno: Community as 'Negative Dialectics'

Jean-Luc Nancy wrote the main parts of his 1986 monograph *The Inoperative Community* at the end of 1982.[43] The core of Nancy's work is concerned with the paradox of how the singular 'I' works within and alongside the group or 'we' in a community.[44] He argues that the 'we' of community has the dangerous potential to erase singular identity (and difference), to subsume everyone into a new single 'whole':

> The community that becomes a single thing (body, mind, fatherland, Leader...) necessarily loses the *in* of being-*in*-common. Or, it loses the *with* or the *together* that defines it. It yields its being-together to a being of togetherness. The truth of community, on the contrary, resides in the retreat of such a being.[45]

The potential violence of this sublimation is reflected in his mention of the 'fatherland', recalling Nazism with its belief in the Aryan master race and the violent erasure of anyone Other - a horrific demonstration of the inclusivity and exclusivity innate in the term community. This essentialism is rejected by Nancy, who argues that a positive working community can only exist with the 'retreat' of this essence. He suggests that a unified community is unobtainable and potentially violent. As Williams demonstrated the erasure of the Other in his linguistic analysis of the term community, Nancy here references its potential use to literally erase the Other. Nancy also is concerned with the way the term community is romanticised. For him, totalitarianism is a modern form of nostalgia for a romantic idea of community – it tries to recreate the lost community of 'the natural family, the

[43] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*.
[44] He followed up this thinking later in Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. by Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).
[45] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. xxxix.

Athenian city, the Roman Republic, the first Christian community' (although he also explains that democratic movements can also fall prey to this mythical nostalgia).[46]

Nancy's work can be read as an ethical undertaking: an exposure of the ideologies which lead to the totalitarianisms of the twentieth century. Here it is useful to see him as part of a larger group of thinkers writing in the wake of Nazism and Stalinism. Hannah Arendt, for example, coined the term 'plurality' to describe societies based on mutual exchange and acceptance of difference. She writes:

> [...] the more people there are in the world who stand in some particular relationship with one another, the more world there is to form between them, and the larger and richer that world will be [...] The more standpoints there are within any given nation from which to view the same world [...], the more significant and open to the world that nation will be.[47]

Arendt's championship of intersubjectivity is staunchly moral: the world will avoid future totalitarian and despotism through the encouragement of different viewpoints rather than the suppression of them.

Whereas Arendt focuses more on the public sphere and politics, Nancy connects these ideas specifically to community. With the rejection of community as either a unified whole or a simply a collection of unrelated people, he asks 'how can the community without essence [...] be presented as such? [...] what might a politics be that does not stem from the will to realize an essence?'.[48] This anti-essentialist community is most clearly explained as 'being-the-one-with-the-other'; as for Arendt, it is interrelationality which constructs community, not the single individuals or the group as

[46] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 13.
[47] Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, ed. by Jerome Kohn (New York: Random House, 2009), p. 176.
[48] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, pp. xxxix–xl.

a whole.[49] Unlike Arendt, Nancy rejects the potential of any specific political structure to create community, because community cannot be planned or pre-produced: it is the moment of being together which produces community; it is invisible, unplanned, a relationality and not a structure. The community, for Nancy, is inoperative for just this fact: it is not a romantic past ideal or a political plan for the future but held within the moment. It is

> [...] in the incessantly present moment at which existence-in-common resists every transcendence that tries to absorb it, be it an All or an Individual (in a Subject in general) [...] [it is a] bond that forms ties without attachments, or even less fusion, of a bond that unbinds by binding, that reunites through the infinite exposition of an irreducible finitude.[50]

The 'bond that unbinds by binding' is a paradox which cannot be overcome, and this is the point of Nancy's argument: one cannot capture community, it wriggles free of any attempt to reify it because to take hold of it and see it as a unified essence would immediately destroy its being-in-common.

Maurice Blanchot has been involved in a dialogue with Nancy about community since the publication of *The Unavowable Community* in 1983.[51] Like Nancy, he sees a negation at the heart of a working community, calling it 'negative community', it is 'incomplete'.[52] He develops Nancy's notion of a disruptive community by highlighting the impossibility of a person stating membership of a community, because that declaration would negate their own identity as separate and singular. Hence community in Blanchot's work is always unavowable, as to articulate that you are part of a community will erase the self and this is impossible to do. The self, for Blanchot, will always and inevitably be separate but nevertheless seeks to create the collective. This position is uncomfortable

[49] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. xxxix.
[50] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. xi.
[51] Leslie Hill, *Nancy, Blanchot: A Serious Controversy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018); Blanchot.
[52] Blanchot, p. 13.

but the only one possible for a functioning community. Blanchot's work is significant to the arguments about theatre, audience and the wider community which follow, particularly because he emphasises that the idea of community can mean both intimate and personal relationships as well as larger political groupings: from the parochial to the national, the homely to a public arena.

The infuriating emptiness at the heart of the inoperative and the unavowable community - the capturing of a moment *between* people rather than *of* people – is comparable to Adorno's theory of negative dialectics. Although Adorno wrote directly about fascism in his work, more relevant to this discussion is his work on Hegel. Adorno sees the common reading of Hegel's dialectical method, that two opposing arguments - thesis and antithesis - are sublimated through discussion and interaction into a coherent whole - the synthesis - as unhelpful, particularly in the way it was used in Communist ideology to promote the belief in the inevitable uprising of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie to create a new state.[53] Dialectics for Adorno

> [...] is a phrase that flouts tradition. As early as Plato, dialectics meant to achieve something positive by means of negation [...] This book seeks to free dialectics from such affirmative traits without reducing its determinacy.[54]

Adorno understands the desire for synthesis, but argues against the possibility of ever achieving a positive and complete synthesis. Scottish playwright David Grieg, author of *The Events*, succinctly describes Adorno's alternative concept as 'a contradiction which disrupts rationality'; it exposes and agitates the idea of the dialectic as unachievable; it unsettles and escapes categorisation; it cannot be pinned down.[55] Adorno's negative dialectics therefore works to articulate Nancy and Blanchot's

[53] Nectarios G. Limnatis, *The Dimensions of Hegel's Dialectic* (London: A&C Black, 2011).
[54] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 1.
[55] David Greig, 'Rough Theatre', in *Cool Britannia: British Political Drama of the 1990s*, ed. by Graham Saunders and Rebecca D'Monte (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 208–21; Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life*, trans. by E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974).

conception of community, the 'bond that unbinds by binding', the interrelationality of 'being-the-one-with-the-other'.[56]

In what follows, my readings of Gray's work at ATC are underpinned by these theoretical difficulties and discomforts. Gray's desire to create work which opened up rather than answered questions of community, his work against the grain of 1980s, explicitly political theatre, and his determination to make audience members conscious of their precarious individuality within the group can all be productively related to the above theorists' concepts of community as essentially unstable and unobtainable. *The Golden Dragon*'s discussion of social interrelationality; the tragedy of the figures in *Illusions*, each of whom mistakenly feels they know the other; and the ending of *The Events*, which posits an acceptance of the inability to understand as an alternative to both violence and reconciliation: these plays all stage notions of 'negative community' and foreground the audience member as 'alone together' in the moment of witnessing live performance.

Lévinas and Community

Blanchot's suggestion that community can be the relationality between the self and the Other as much as the self and a larger group, is developed by Emmanuel Lévinas' writings on the interaction between self and Other, which provide a useful structure for considering further the ethical implications of community. Like the theorists above, Lévinas was in part writing in response to Nazism, theorising the emergence of right wing extremism and how to counter it in future. The self's relationship to the Other was essential to his thinking.[57] Lévinas argues for an ethics based on the relationality between the self and the Other, in particular the face-to-face encounter, rather than an ethics based on inward self-examination which he suggests characterised the majority of

[56] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, pp. xxxix, xxi.
[57] Lévinas, pp. 95–99.

writing before him. He rejects the potential romanticisation of the notion that, as in Hegel's dialectic, the interaction of self and Other could lead to a synthesis of ideas and thought. The face of Lévinas' Other is inscrutable and cannot be synthesised with the self: its inscrutability is what makes the encounter powerful. Lévinas emphasises, in the words of Nicholas Ridout, the

> [...] unknowability and anonymity of the face; [...] the absolute quality of the demand to infinite responsibility; [...] the self comes into being only through this encounter with, and infinite subjection to, the Other.[58]

The Other is never fully understood or captured, but instead it is the realisation of the impossibility of understanding that gives the social encounter its ethical potential. Lévinas' idea of the 'infinite responsibility' and 'infinite subjection' which is created by the relationship with the Other adds a sense of suppression to Nancy's 'infinite exposition of an irreducible finitude' which is particularly useful when considering relationality in the theatre.[59] Ridout, in *Theatre and Ethics*, connects these ideas to the act of watching theatre, suggesting that

> [...] there is something particular about theatrical spectatorship that offers ways of thinking about ethics — and, specifically, thinking socially and politically about ethics — that no other cultural practice seems to offer. Theatre inserts its ethical questions into the lives of its spectators in a situation in which those spectators are unusually conscious of their own status as spectators, and thus as people who may exercise ethical judgment. It also takes place in the presence of spectators who are aware of their status as spectators who are engaged in reciprocal spectatorship. We watch ourselves watching people engaging with an

[58] Nicholas Ridout, *Theatre and Ethics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 55.
[59] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. xi.

> ethical problem while knowing that we are being watched in our watching (by other spectators and also by those we watch).[60]

Here, Ridout articulates the possible dissonance between the spectator-as-individual and audience-as-group, but frames it in specifically ethical terms. The sense of reciprocity within the audience, and between the spectators and stage is set alongside the self-consciousness in the spectator as individual. Ridout argues that this is particularly significant in theatre because each person's reactions and responses can be scrutinised and read by others: it is a public place. He argues that ethics is simply the philosophy surrounding a simple question – 'how should I act?' – a question which I was effectively asking when wondering whether to sing along with the performer or remain silent during *The Events*.[61] He argues that questions of ethics are unavoidable in the theatre, because in the theatre audience one sees others' reactions, and one sees others watching one's own reactions: how to act is not just a philosophical question but something performed (in public) by the spectator.

Gareth White explores a related potential embarrassment in spectatorship, specifically in relation to audience participation. He suggests that spectators are often unwilling to take part in audience participation because

> [t]o expose unconsidered thoughts or emotions in a semi-public place is risky, just as it is to display incompetence, inappropriate enthusiasm, neediness, distress or loss of poise. The risk in all these cases is that we undermine the careful (though not often entirely conscious) performance of a consistent and functional persona: the public self.[62]

[60] Ridout, *Theatre and Ethics*, p. 1.
[61] Ridout, *Theatre and Ethics*, p. 1.
[62] Gareth White, *Audience Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 76.

Ridout takes this idea further, and argues that the audience does not need physically to participate in order to feel embarrassment, because the spectator can be scrutinized in the public space of the auditorium already. This can lead to uncomfortable affects: embarrassment and uneasiness, for example.[63] In Ridout's book *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems* he focuses on the kinds of affect produced when unplanned events happen, such as uncontrollable animals or actors forgetting their lines. He suggests that

> [t]he theatre is structured upon the face-to-face encounter, and it is around the ethical, aesthetic and political problems of such encounters that the wrongness of theatre appears and organises itself. [...] In theatre you always know you are there, at the scene of the action, at the site of production. Seeing yourself there, and others there, and facing up to the nature of your relationship with these others, is what disquiets the mind [...][64]

However, rather than accidentally produced 'wrongness', the focus of Ridout's interest, I argue that this discomfort in Gray's work for ATC is consciously produced as part of his artistic scheme. The work examined here foregrounds rather than erases the inscrutability of the Other, deliberately creating embarrassment of this kind, and producing an ethical self-consciousness in the audience. ATC places its audiences in difficult ethical situations, where they have to decide how to act: as part of the group, or as demonstrably different. In Gray's first work with ATC, *The Golden Dragon*, the audience are invited to laugh at a cartoonish depiction of Aesop's ant and cricket fable, which is subsequently revealed to be a tale of sex slavery – an attempt to encourage the spectators to reassess their initial responses to the story, and remind them that stories may be more morally and ethically complex than they first seem. In *Illusions* the spectators sit in shared light with the

[63] White, p. 73.
[64] Nicholas Ridout, *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 30.

performers, listening to the actors narrate a seemingly simple story. It gradually becomes apparent that the performers are twisting and manipulating the narrative. The audience are positioned so that, increasingly, they do not know how to react lest they, in the communal light, are seen to respond inappropriately: for example, laughing at something revealed to be tragic, or maintaining rapt attention to a story which is in fact a joke. As discussed above, in *The Events* the audience are invited to sing along with the community choir on stage, but at one point the words seem to celebrate an act of terrorism. Again, this invitation is created to position the spectator precariously and so that they are left unsure of how to respond. ATC uses a sophisticated form of entrapment of the audience through its dramaturgical structures; the work forces the spectators to consider their own responses, their encounter with the often inscrutable Other, and the pressures to conform as a community of spectators in a public space. The audience is used as a phenomenological demonstration of the ethical difficulties of response to the Other and of being part of a community. At many points in the performances, there is no obvious way of 'how to act', foregrounding this ethical question through affectual embarrassment.

How might we create a theatre based on Lévinas's obfuscated face when the faces of the actors are almost always visible and seemingly readable? I argue that ATC's work creates just such obfuscated figures within its work: the characters onstage are often not fully realised - narratives describing action are undermined and revealed to be ways of manipulating the audience. In *The Golden Dragon* all the actors play against type, endeavouring to present people of different sexes, different ages, and different ethnicities. In *Illusions* the actors narrate stories about characters we never see, and their stories are often undermined and contested by the other actors. In *The Events* one actor plays a variety of parts, including a terrorist, a BNP politician, a psychiatrist, and the girlfriend of the protagonist: his 'face' constantly changes, his character is never fixed. Watching such performances is uncomfortable and can create the kinds of ethical embarrassments explored by Lévinas and Ridout. ATC produces an audience experience which highlights the difficulty of fully engaging with the Other; it recognises the vulnerability of the spectator as in Lévinas's face-to-face

ethical encounter. ATC's dramaturgical structures encourage openness and dialogue, and an acknowledgement and respect for difference rather than an erasure of it.

Agamben: Community and Singularity

Giorgio Agamben's 1990 book *The Coming Community* is indebted to Nancy and Blanchot, and starts with a similar premise.[65] Community, argues Agamben, must be anti-essentialist in order to function. He sees totalitarianism as the extreme example of an essentialist community: all within it must unify and become uniform, those without it must be exterminated. He advocates 'an inessential commonality, a solidarity that in no way concerns an essence'.[66] Nancy and Blanchot interrogate the problematic notion of community as synthesis, and advocate that the individual's position cannot and should not to be subsumed by the larger group. Agamben looks at the paradox of community by focussing on the idea of the *individual* within the group: he suggests that the notion of a coherent, cohesive individual is as much a falsehood as the unified, cohesive community. He deconstructs the idea of a single identity, choosing the word singularity instead to describe an individual. Singularity is simply a description of the potentiality of the self; it is 'neither particular nor universal, neither one nor multiple [...] and absolutely inessential'.[67] His idea of singularity emphasises the ethical nature of identity because it is unfixed and open to choices:

> [...] if human beings were or had to be this or that substance, this or that destiny, no ethical experience would be possible ... This does not mean, however, that humans are not, and do not have to be, something, that they are simply consigned to nothingness and therefore can freely decide whether to be or not to be, to adopt or not to adopt this or that destiny

[65] Agamben.
[66] Agamben, p. 19.
[67] Agamben, pp. 18–19.

> (nihilism and decisionism coincide at this point). There is in effect something that humans are and have to be, but this is not an essence nor properly a thing: It is the simple fact of one's own existence as possibility or potentiality. But precisely because of this ethics become complicated; precisely because of this ethics becomes effective.[68]

Identity cannot be presupposed because it does not exist – and similarly, in Agamben's equation, community cannot be presupposed or fixed. His community is simply a reiteration of a singularity, but on a larger scale. Belonging together is what creates this conception of community:

> What could be the politics of whatever singularity, that is, of a being whose community is mediated not by any condition of belonging (being red, being Italian, being Communist) nor by the simple absence of conditions (a negative community, such as recently proposed in France by Maurice Blanchot), but by belonging itself?[69]

As we will see, a comparable question is at the heart of Gray's work for ATC's work. It demands that audiences consider the politics of belonging, and critiques the desire of the self for a 'wholeness' which is unobtainable. In particular, the production of *Crave* examines selfhood, and the desire and unavailability of wholeness; as we will see, the production effectively mirrors the deconstruction of the idea of community by deconstructing the idea of the self.

Joseph and Bauman: Community and Utopia

[68] Agamben, p. 43.
[69] Agamben, p. 85.

We have seen that Nancy in particular discussed the nostalgia inherent in the idea of community, which he sees as promoting totalitarianism. This idea was developed further by Miranda Joseph in her book *Against the Romance of Community*, in which she argues that capitalism and modernity generate the discourse of an (unobtainable) utopian community in order to legitimate social hierarchies, a reminder of the potential for communities to be racist, sexist, bigoted, violent and to promote unequal social relations as well as consolidating them.[70] Iris Marion Young succinctly explains this idea in her essay 'The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference':

> The ideal of community ... privileges unity over difference, immediacy over meditation, sympathy over recognition of one's understanding of others from their point of view. Community is an understandable dream, expressing a desire for selves that are transparent to one another, relationships of mutual identification, social closeness and comfort. The dream is understandable, but politically problematic ... because those motivated by it will tend to suppress differences among themselves or implicitly exclude from their political groups persons with whom they do not identify.[71]

This problematic unity is also marked by Zygmunt Bauman, who suggests that in the concept of community there is no criticism or opposition. Community is '[...] nowadays another name for paradise lost – but one we dearly hope to return, and so we feverishly seek the roads that may bring us there'.[72] Of all the theorists in this survey, Bauman is the most forgiving of the desire for this utopia. He characterises the post-modern contemporary world as insecure, promoting alienation and loneliness, and this condition is what exacerbates the desire for an (unobtainable) utopian community. Bauman admits to the seductive nature of utopian community and compares

[70] Joseph.
[71] Iris Marion Young, 'The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference', in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. by Linda J Nicholson (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 300–323.
[72] Bauman, *Community*, p. 3.

contemporary seekers of community to Tantalus and the grapes, with an object so close but never to be grasped.[73] It is an understandable desire: he suggests that '[b]eing human, we can neither fulfil the hope [of community] nor cease hoping'.[74] Part of the human condition in the post-modern world is the constant hope for, and inability to achieve, this kind of community.

Bauman points to a paradox at the heart of the idea of community, but it is different to the paradox of self/group of Nancy and Blanchot. He states that

> [m]issing community means missing security; gaining community [...] would soon mean missing freedom. Security and freedom are two equally precious and coveted values which could be better or worse balanced, but hardly fully reconciled and without friction.[75]

As we will see, there is a direct parallel here with Mouffe's democratic paradox of liberalism (freedom) and democracy (community) which I describe below.[76] When envisaging what a contemporary community could be, Bauman argues that

> [i]f there is to be a community in the world of individuals, it can only be (and needs to be) a community woven together from sharing and mutual care; a community of common concern and responsibility for the equal right to be human and the equal ability to act on that right.[77]

[73] Bauman, *Community*, p. 17.
[74] Bauman, *Community*, p. 5.
[75] Bauman, *Community*, p. 4.
[76] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*.
[77] Bauman, *Community*, pp. 149–50.

The productions in my case-studies all depict this desire for safety within community, in different ways. In *The Golden Dragon* the characters all exist in a lost, empty, post-modern metropolis where interactions are predominantly shallow and superficial. In *Illusions* the protagonists of the story flit between the Baumanesque safety of marriage and the freedom of separation, with neither offering complete satisfaction. In *The Events* Claire's innocent prelapsarian paradise, her multicultural choir, is invaded by a violence which exposes the fractures in her liberal ideology of community, leading to a complete disintegration of her belief system. In *Crave* the desperation to be loved also represents an unobtainable utopia of unity with the Other. However, ATC's theatre, like Bauman's work, is forgiving of this desire and characterises it as understandable. It is the acknowledgement of this desire as unobtainable which for Claire, in *The Events*, leads to a more workable conception of self and community. *The Golden Dragon* also hints at a sympathy for the desire for impossible human connections in the final image of the air hostess sucking the tooth of the Asian Boy, simultaneously portraying vast separation and bodily intimacy. The tragedies in *Illusions* occur specifically because of the characters' fixation on obtaining a 'true' relationship based on complete exchange; the play acts as a warning to the audience of the impossibility and violent potential inherent in this idea.

Habermas, Sennett and Olssen: Dialogical Community and Empathy

Habermas does not reject the label of community outright, but argues instead that we should consider it as a fluid term, one which suggests the constant communication and interactions of people rather than a static monolith. He problematises the notion of similarity as the basis of unity, which he counters with the depiction of a dynamic, constantly evolving community model, similar to Richard Sennett's, discussed below. Habermas introduces an ongoing dynamism into his theorisation of community which marks it out as different to the aforementioned theorists, though

he shares their sense that community cannot encompass a moral totality, which he associates with some of the more dangerous examples of community in the twentieth century - in particular, Nazism.[78]

Mark Olssen also suggests how we might build community in a contemporary, neoliberal age by encouraging the acceptance of movement within and between community structures.[79] In his book *Towards a Global Thin Community*, Olssen looks at the debate between libertarianism and communitarianism, the former of which focuses on the self over the group, the latter which champions the group over the self. He suggests that it is currently useful to think of our communities as somewhere between these polarities: our sense of self and our sense of community control us in different ways, we move between the two, particularly in our globalised world, which has 'thinned' out specific cultures and allowed constant interaction between different people. Difference within the community, for Olssen, is a positive and inevitable outcome of globalisation, with the caveat that he recognises there are certain human rights which remain unassailable. He proposes some helpful terminology to describe these ideas of community. A 'thick community' is one with little difference of culture and opinion within it: a community where people are bound by similarities of belief, race and ideology, and one which in the post-modern world is increasingly unobtainable. Olssen instead calls for a 'thin community', something similar to the dynamic and ever changing community of Habermas. 'Thin community' is not monolithic but ever-changing. It is only unified in terms of its egalitarianism. Olssen's thesis celebrates 'the interdependence of societies and individuals [...] community structures are integrally a part of individual lives. Individuals and communities thus presuppose each other'.[80] 'Thin community' allows for communities to grow and diminish through time and over distance. The 'global thin community' of

[78] Habermas, p. 112.
[79] Mark Olssen, *Toward a Global Thin Community: Nietzsche, Foucault, and the Cosmopolitan Commitment* (Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2010).
[80] Olssen, p. 210.

the title suggests that there is no beginning or end to any one community, but rather than communities are all interlinked.

Richard Sennett develops this idea by theorising the kinds of communication which might be suitable for this kind of thin community. He defines communication within communities as based on two differing structures of contact. He rejects the belief that the Hegalian 'dialectical' method of exchange is most suitable in contemporary communities, that 'the verbal play of opposites should gradually build up to a synthesis [... with] the aim [...] to come to a common understanding'.[81] This type of communication, argues Sennett, shuts down meanings and differences of opinion to create a forced, unified, final idea, and reiterates the problematic insistence on unity discussed by the community theorists discussed above. More useful for Sennett is 'dialogic' interaction, which he borrows as a term from Russian writer Mikhail Bakhtin.[82] Sennett suggests that the 'dialogic'

> [...] name[s] a discussion which does not resolve itself by finding common ground. Though no shared agreements may be reached, through the process of exchange people may become more aware of their own views and expand their understanding of one another [...] Bakhtin applied the concept of knitted-together but divergent exchange to writers like Rabelais and Cervantes, whose dialogues are just the opposite of the converging agreement in dialectic. Rabelais's characters shoot off in seemingly irrelevant directions which other characters pick up on; the discussion then thickens, the characters spurred on by one another.[83]

Sennett's understanding of dialogical interactions argues for the protean, ongoing nature of community discussion. No one solution need be completely fixed; instead, opposing ideas can

[81] Sennett, p. 18.
[82] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, 17th edn (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008).
[83] Sennett, p. 19.

coexist and be readily available. Dialogic exchange is preferable to dialectical exchange in Sennett's terms, because in communities no real synthesis of beliefs or ideas is ever truly obtainable; community works best as a continuing dialogue and encounter between different people who are able to empathise with each other but who are not necessarily unified in their opinions. Dialogical interactions aim not for dissent but to consolidate relationships and understanding between people within a community (and, for my purposes, audiences), based on an acknowledgement of the differences within and a drive to explore what these differences are. Dialogical interaction encourages debate and understanding through listening and focusing on the Other. As in Lévinas's encounter, the Other may not ever be completely knowable – but it is the drive to try and understand, to listen and witness, which promotes community in Sennett's model.

The idea of dialogic interaction is productive for a theorisation of theatre audiences, because it favours neither a drive for unity of ideas nor a drive for uniqueness. It emphasises the tirelessly mutable movement of opinions within an audience, and argues for its political productivity. Audience members are neither a coherent whole or separate people together: the interactions between people as they watch the theatre event are what define them. Listening and witnessing the ideas of other is essential: Sennett argues that this in itself is a serious and active endeavour. This negotiation of the self in relation to society, and its dynamic nature, is what I mean when I use the term 'dialogic' in this thesis.

The association between community and unity are usefully countered by Sennett. He argues that 'a dialogic conversation can be ruined by too much identification', because this can create a false sense that each person fully understands the Other; identification erases the productive tension between different people.[84] Sennett connects the dialogical encounter with the act of empathy (in distinction to sympathy, which he connects to the dialectical encounter). He states that

[84] Sennett, p. 20.

> [a]s a philosophic matter, sympathy can be understood as one emotional reward for the thesis-antithesis-synthesis play of dialectic: 'Finally, we understand each other,' and that feels good. Empathy is more linked to dialogic exchange; though curiosity sustains the exchange, we don't experience the same satisfaction of closure, of wrapping things up.[85]

Like the Lévinasian depiction of the Other, empathy is created not by seeing and understanding the Other, but by scrutinising the Other in all its difference, and using this encounter to inform how the individual might then act. Sennett again:

> Both sympathy and empathy convey recognition, and both forge a bond, but one is an embrace, the other an encounter. Sympathy overcomes differences through imaginative acts of identification; empathy attends to another person on his or her own terms.[86]

Empathy is the dialogic in action; it does not demand a move to unification but problematises simple belief systems, expands understanding, encourages thought. Embarrassment and unease can be created in the dialogic moment because in the obfuscated Other there is no clear indication of 'how to act'. ATC's work does not try to argue a specific ethical point of view or ideology; it exposes the difficulty of understanding others in the contemporary age and the importance of maintaining community despite this. It emphases the difficulty of creating relationships within the globalised, contemporary, thin community. During Gray's directorship, ATC has sought, I will argue, to construct this kind of empathetic but uneasy encounter between audience and performer.

[85] Sennett, p. 22.
[86] Sennett, p. 21.

Bourriaud, Rancière, and Bishop: Community and Relational Aesthetics

Whilst community as a theoretical concept has not been widely used in theatre and art scholarship outside of work on 'applied' or 'socially engaged' performance, it is important to note that since the 1990s the question of relationality between spectator and art object / performance, and to what extent different relationalities can create a sense of community, has been the subject of much debate. These debates, although not often name-checking community directly, focus on the philosophy of interrelationality in a similar way to the aforementioned community theorists. Nicholas Bourriaud first coined the term 'relational aesthetics' in his 1998 work of the same name, to describe the breadth of art practice in the 1990s which focussed on relationality. Bourriaud states that relational aesthetics is

> [a]n art taking its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space.[87]

Bourriaud applauds this development and suggests that '[...] the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to create ways of living and models of action within the existing world'.[88] Relational artworks 'construct models of sociability suitable for producing human relations, the same way architecture literally "produces" the itineraries of those presiding in it'.[89] They operate in the

[87] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presse Du Reel, 1998), p. 14.
[88] Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009); Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October*, 110 (2004), 51–79.
[89] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 70.

> sphere of inter-human relations [...] and the various communication processes, in their tangible dimension as tools serving to link individuals and human groups together.[90]

The ability of art to link individuals together in this way is also, it has been argued, part of the work of twenty-first century participatory performance, which often calls on the spectator to be physically active. Shannon Jackson, for example, argues that international performance practices can help 'contribute to inter-dependent social imagining'.[91] In words reminiscent of Nancy's 'being-the-one-with-the-other', Dee Heddon, Helen Iball and Rachel Zerihan, describing one-to-one theatre, argue that its

> [...] performance might, then, be situated as a 'counterpublic' - a way of 'rethinking intimacy', in order to address anxieties over how - in a world of inter-racial and inter-ethnic conflict and global inequalities and injustices - we might live together, better. Performances of intimacy, in their very staging, seem to demand performances of trust, mutual responsibility, mutual openness and mutual receptiveness. In this, they correlate with a critical understanding of subjectivity, of 'being' as 'being-together'.[92]

These ideas, celebrating the ability of art to create an interrogatory togetherness, have been scrutinised in comparable ways to the term community. Bourriaud's ideas have been countered by Jaques Rancière, who suggests that relational aesthetics are 'little more than a moral revival in the arts', similar to theatrical structures such as those of Brecht who 'present to the collective audience performances intended to teach the spectators how they can stop being spectators and become

[90] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 43.
[91] Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 14.
[92] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*; Eirini Kartsaki, Rachel Zerihan, and Brian Lobel, 'Generous Gestures and Frustrated Acts: Ethics in One-to-One Performance', *Performing Ethos: International Journal of Ethics in Theatre & Performance*, 3.2 (2012), 99–105 (p. 126).

performers of a collective identity'.[93] In *The Emancipated Spectator* Rancière takes issue in particular with the teacherly tone of such practice, which he equates to the mistaken notion that the physically passive audience are ignorant voyeurs, to be instructed and activated into a unified whole which conforms to the ideas presented by the theatre. He states that

> [t]he spectator is supposed to be redeemed when he is no longer an individual, when he is restored to the status of a member of a community, when he is carried off in the collective energy or led to the position of the citizen who acts a member of the collective.[94]

The issues of homogenisation and loss, identity and self-hood in Nancy and Blanchot's writings about community are reiterated in a different form by Rancière. Rancière argues that theatre audiences should be understood as 'a dissensual community', and asserts that 'an aesthetic community is a community structured by disconnection'.[95] Again, this idea parallels the inoperative or unavowable community, a group where consensus is not the tie which binds.

Claire Bishop is another critic of relational art (and latterly participatory theatre) practice; she sees it as predominantly 'utopian, naive and unrealistic', and argues that in commodifying experience, the practice can be seen as complicit with neoliberal capitalism. It therefore 'offers its audiences no real power and actually deadens their awareness of the ways dominant economies unfold and exploit them'.[96] She states that 'the relations set up by relational aesthetics are not intrinsically democratic, as Bourriaud suggests, since they rest too comfortably within an ideal of

[93] Nicolas Bourriaud, 'Precarious Constructions: Answer to Jacques Rancière on Art and Politics', *Open!*, 17 (2009), 20–37.
Jacques Rancière.
[94] Jaques Rancière, 'The Emancipated Spectator', *Art Forum*, 2007, pp. 270–81 (p. 278).
[95] Jacques Rancière, p. 59.
[96] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 12; See also: Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics'.

subjectivity as whole and of community as immanent togetherness'.[97] Bishop's argument replays Joseph's discussed above, that the romantic perception of community can actually serve to subject people to neoliberal capitalism rather than help them move beyond it. Bishop suggests that performance work which antagonises the audience is the most effective in exposing and problamatising dominant ideologies. She argues that 'the most urgent forms of artistic practice today stem from a necessity to rethink the connections between the individual and the collective ... [which might involve] perversity, paradox and negation', recalling Adorno's negative dialectics and the paradox of self/group within the concept of community.[98]

I do not write about participatory art or theatre in this thesis, however these debates about it uncannily mirror those already featured about the philosophy of community. I argue that Gray's productions are created to expose the problems and paradoxes inherent in an essentialist idea of community, and this theatre work is close to what Rancière and Bishop envisage in their conceptions of productive art and theatre. Bishop suggests that good performance art communicates 'the paradoxes that are repressed in everyday discourse, and to elicit perverse, disturbing and pleasurable experiences that enlarge our capacity to imagine the world and our relations anew' – in much the same way Gray's theatre rejects a romantic conception of community to instead encourage disagreement and contemplation in an audience which is respected as an intellectual equal.[99] The anxiety and discomfort mentioned by Rancière and Bishop is found in Gray's works: ATC's theatre expresses the paradox of togetherness as a conundrum and a problem to be thought through.

Community, Politics and Theatre Scholarship

[97] Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', p. 51.
[98] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, pp. 39–40.
[99] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 284.

Theoretical discussions about community have not been widely used in recent theatre scholarship, with publications focussing on performance's social potential usually framed with the word 'political' (although it is important to mark that just as this thesis was completed an edited collection, *Of Precariousness: Vulnerabilities, Responsibilities, Communities in 21st-Century British Drama and Theatre* was published, which was notable for using Nancy's conception of the inoperative community in work on contemporary theatre).[100] This is perhaps due to the fact that the term 'community' in relation to theatre has been used widely to describe community theatre, by which I mean practice which seeks to involve its audience-participants and generate positive social change, and which has often privileged the importance of the process of creation to the lives of the participants over the artistic product created. In the words of Baz Kershaw, community theatre 'represent[ed] a theatre of social engagement, a theatre primarily committed to bringing about actual change in specific communities'.[101] However, by 1999 Kershaw had articulated disenchantment with the idea of 'community theatre' in theatre practice. Kershaw describes community theatre as aiming to 'combine art and action, aesthetics and pragmatics' that 'were shaped by the culture of their audience's community', and argued that since the fall of the Berlin wall, it had become apparent that these kinds of theatre structures were in fact unable to effect political change.[102] He stated that the 'old notions of [...] theatre were falling into disrepute'.[103] It was Kershaw who championed the new term 'applied' theatre, which was then used instead of community. Duška Radosavljevic notes that Kershaw only then refers to 'community theatre' in his 1999 book as work from the 1970s and 1980s – preferring to use the terms 'applied theatre' or

[100] See for example the following publications, which all deal with ideas of community but use the term politics or society: Adam Alston, *Beyond Immersive Theatre: Aesthetics, Politics and Productive Participation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Vicky Angelaki, *Social and Political Theatre in 21st-Century Britain: Staging Crisis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017); Marissa Fragkou, *Ecologies of Precarity in Twenty-First Century Theatre: Politics, Affect, Responsibility* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018); Mireia Aragay and Martin Middeke, *Of Precariousness, Vulnerabilities, Responsibilities, Communities in 21st-Century British Drama and Theatre* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017).
[101] Baz Kershaw, *The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 5.
[102] Baz Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 5.
[103] Kershaw, *The Radical in Performance*.

'radical performance' to describe the community theatre work of the 1990s, by which he meant politically engaged theatre work outside of traditional performance venues.[104]

This turn against the term community theatre, and the associated distrust of the concept of community in the theoretical texts I have described above, is perhaps why the term has been side-lined from more recent accounts of contemporary theatre practice. Community as a term is indelibly linked to the idea of the community theatre of the 1970s and 1980s. As I suggested in the Introduction, when contemporary scholars focus on theatre's potential for social critique, they more often use the terms society or politics rather than community. Amongst scholars of 'applied' or 'socially engaged' theatre, community is still a potent term; the introduction to Caoimhe McAvinchey's collection *Performance and Community*, for example, suggests that theatre work created with and about particular 'communities' can 'critique and reimagine the idea of community perpetuated in contemporary political discourse - a magical place bound up in notions of safety, nostalgia or utopia...'.[105] This thesis argues that just such critiques and reimaginings of community can productively be explored in the kinds of contemporary theatre that scholarship seems reluctant to associate with the term.

Political Antagonism: Theory outside of 'Community'

This thesis is influenced by a variety of writing which does not explicitly use the term community, but nevertheless draws on ideas that are relevant and related. Even the recent edited collection from Tony Fisher and Eve Katsouraki, *Performing Antagonism: Theatre, Performance and Radical Democracy,* which is directly concerned with 'socially engaged' performance, has similar

[104] Tomlin, p. 158.
[105] Caoimhe McAvinchey, *Performance and Community: Commentary and Case Studies* (London: Methuen, 2013), p. 1.

concerns to the issues of community and performance raised in this thesis, but does not investigate the concept of community *per se*. They suggest that

> [...] the politics of "socially engaged" performance practices cannot be simply a matter of mutual exclusion – the assertion of "either/or" – as if political engagement could be reduced to a simplistic choice between a position of permanent opposition and self-exclusion or the deathly embrace of conformism implicit in the politics of consensus.[106]

The spectre of conformism, and its ability to neutralise and eradicate difference into a homogenous whole, haunts their writing as it does mine. Their rejection of the 'either/or' is strikingly similar to the discussions around the false dichotomy of self/group in community theory. Theorising structures of performance which respond to the precarious contemporary moment post- the Iraq war and the 2008 financial crash, the editors reject the label of 'a moribund "political theatre"', which I read as referring to the left-wing British theatre of the 1970s and 80s and its teacherly political solutions.[107] Fisher and Katsouraki's collection focuses on the moments when

> [...] the *demos* asserts itself as a power of division, whose condition of visibility lies precisely in the act of disagreeing with the with existing consensus[108]

Their interests lie in contemporary performance which offers insight and reflections on 'radical democratic politics'; they focus on the precarity of the contemporary moment to create a productive

[106] *Performing Antagonism - Theatre, Performance & Radical Democracy*, ed. by Tony Fisher and Eve Katsouraki (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 5.
[107] Fisher and Katsouraki, p. 4.
[108] Fisher and Katsouraki, p. 6.

ambiguity when exploring political issues.[109] Like the writers in this collection, I seek to understand politics (or rather community) and its articulation in performance 'in terms of its contingency, its constitutive openness, its arbitrariness and its unpredictability'.[110] To theorise 'the act of disagreeing', the writers draw on two theoretical frameworks, both of which can usefully be applied to the work of this thesis. Firstly, they use the theatrical form of the tragic, arguing that a 'tragic conception of the political' is useful for understanding the 'arbitrariness and [...] unpredictability' of the political present, in particular using the Greek conception of the agon and agonistic behaviour to suggest that this 'politics will be principally defined [...] through the experience of its antagonisms'.[111] The Ancient Greek conception of the agonia as a site of ongoing public debate, argument and contestation, 'a struggle that is permeated by the acknowledgement that no final reconciliation of the social is possible', is fundamental to this perception of the political.[112] In examining antagonism they reference Rancière and Bishop's interest in dissensus, as I have done above, and which I see as a parallel to Nancy's uncomfortable and inessentialist relationality, of being-the-one-with-the-other, which defines the inoperative community.[113] Secondly, Fisher and Katsouraki complement their conception of antagonistic performance with the work of Chantal Mouffe, who defines the healthy working of democracy through the 'ever present possibility' or potentiality that antagonism in democracy creates – much in the way that Blanchot understands his unavowable community.[114]

Mouffe's other writings serve as a helpful rearticulation of what the theorists on community have defined as a key paradox: the problem of the relationship between self and group in the concept of community. Mouffe's book describes *The Democratic Paradox*, which is based on the pull

[109] Fisher and Katsouraki, p. 6.
[110] Fisher and Katsouraki, p. 4.
[111] Fisher and Katsouraki, p. 3.
[112] Fisher and Katsouraki, p. 12.
[113] Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (London: Verso Books, 2013), p. 5.
[114] Mouffe, *Agonistics*, p. 5.

between liberalism (which champions freedom) and democracy (which champions consensus). She states that

> [...] by preventing the full development of [liberalism and democracy's] respective logics, this articulation represents an obstacle to their complete realization; both perfect liberty and perfect equality become impossible. But this is the very condition of possibility for a pluralist form of human coexistence in which rights can exist and be exercised, in which freedom and equality can somehow manage to coexist. [... There is a need to] realize that pluralistic democratic politics consist in pragmatic, precarious and necessarily unstable forms of negotiating its constitutive paradox.[115]

Instability, and not synthesis, is at the heart of Mouffe's democratic paradox as it is of negative dialectics. Mouffe again:

> A central argument in this book is that it is vital for democratic politics to understand that liberal democracy results from the articulation of two logics which are incompatible in the last instance and that there is no way in which they could be perfectly reconciled.[116]

The myth of the possibility of synthesis, which community theorists ultimately link to totalitarianism, is criticised by Mouffe as it appears in '[n]ew centrist politics such as New Labour [who] suggest the possibility of a "rational consensus"'.[117] This makes centrist politics unpalatable to many people with left or right leanings, as the compromise is unworkable, leading to the popularity of more extremist parties. Instead Mouffe calls for

[115] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, pp. 10–11.
[116] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 5.
[117] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 7.

> [...] an "agonistic" democracy [which] requires accepting that conflict and division are inherent to politics and that there is no place where reconciliation could be definitively achieved as the full actualization of the unity of "the people" ... [h]ence the importance of its paradoxical nature. [...] Liberal-democratic politics consists, in fact, in the constant process of negotiation and renegotiation – through different hegemonic articulations – of this constitutive paradox.[118]

Mouffe's democratic paradox bears a strong resemblance to Sennett's idea of the dialogic, of discussion and articulation without the need or desire to synthesis into a unified whole, though Mouffe is more willing to accept that seemingly negative attributes such as 'conflict' and 'division' are essential to this kind of intersubjectivity.

The confrontation, disagreement, and discomfort which Mouffe sees as productive and essential are also things which I argue Gray specifically seeks to construct in ATC's productions and their audience reception. She states that '[t]he agonistic approach [...] is where conflicting points of view are confronted without any possibility of a final reconciliation'.[119] She suggests that the construction of unease and discomfort in art can enhance the cognitive dimension of the artwork:

> If artistic practices can play a decisive role in the construction of new forms of subjectivity, it is because, in using resources which induce emotional responses, they are able to reach human beings at the affective level [to enhance its] cognitive dimension.[120]

[118] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, pp. 15–16, 45.
[119] Mouffe, *Agonistics*, p. 92.
[120] Mouffe, *Agonistics*, p. 96.

She helpfully suggests that this creation of uncomfortable affects should not be taken to extremes: complete refusal or 'absolute negation' in art or theatre is simply destructive. The balance of opinion and interaction of thought, rather than a simple rejection of hegemony, is where the political potential of this practice lies.[121]

The frames of antagonistic performance and Mouffe's democratic paradox are a useful addition to the ideas raised in work on the concept of community, because they posit counters to the 'warmly persuasive' quality of the term marked by Williams (see above). Part of the work of this thesis is to demonstrate the constructive similarities between community and political theory, and to encourage future theatre scholars to consider this in their work.

'Community Cohesion' and Contemporary British Politics

In 2010 Ric Knowles suggested the following, just as Ramin Gray was taking up the artistic directorship of ATC:

> The "c" word (community), of course, has become so compromised through its use in rhetorically shoring up the neoliberal inclusionist/exclusionist agenda that it's only good for grant applications and web sites. As Alan Filewod pointed out in an editorial in CTR as early as 1995, "the language of community coincides . . . too neatly . . . with the instrumental language used by the conservative right." But the wish to subvert the entrepreneurial individualism of neoliberalism nevertheless needs to function in the (on one hand) difficult, power-inflected and (on the other hand) stimulating, improvisatory realm of the social, where "community" is constantly negotiated, neither taken for granted nor sedimented.[122]

[121] Mouffe, *Agonistics*, p. 105.
[122] Ric Knowles, 'Improvisation', *Canadian Theatre Review*, 143 (2010), 3–5 (p. 3).

Knowles' comment makes for a disheartening read. He explicitly connects the language of community with the contemporary neoliberal agenda, and suggests that its use in the theatre industry is similarly rhetorical, because practitioners are aware of how little it means but sense how important it is as an ideological tool in the contemporary political climate. He writes specifically about the Canadian theatre industry, but his argument is useful in analysing comparable problems in the British theatre of the 2000s and early 2010s. ATC's work has been created at a historical moment where there have been significant public debates about community and identity in Britain, particularly around terrorism, the exit from the European Union, and immigration.

Certainly, since the early 2000s, the term 'community' has taken on a new rhetorical strength in British public discourse. In the coining of the new term 'community cohesion', the then Labour government was invoking the idea of community to produce 'cohesion' within an increasingly divided society. The word cohesion is described in the OED as '[t]he action or condition of cohering; cleaving or sticking together; spec. the force with which the molecules of a body or substance cleave together'.[123] The word is suggestive of a body politic which maintains health through the cohesion of its different parts and in Labour government rhetoric, the formation of togetherness and cohesion are seen as the primary goal of community. In this formation, no man is a Donnean island but definitively part of the main. The idea of 'community cohesion' was repeatedly used by Blair's government, and has remained a defining idea in political discourse to the present, through the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government elected in 2010, and the Conservative government elected in 2015. Here I want to briefly chart how the term came into use in contemporary British political discourse and how it has changed over time; I will suggest that while early uses of the term were well-intentioned, through its use in political discourse and policy, it has become devalued through its overuse and constant redefinition. I am broadly in agreement with Knowles' assessment of the way the term has become used to support an inclusionist /exclusionist

[123] 'Cohesion, N.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/35943> [accessed 23 March 2017].

agenda of the neoliberal right. I also want to argue that the repeated use of the term 'community cohesion' has linked the idea of community inextricably with wider contemporary debates about immigration, Britishness, identity and nationhood.

'Community cohesion' was an idea created to replace the political ideology of multiculturalism, an ideology which Roger Hewitt explains had come to prominence in the 1990s to ease the problems of increased racial tension in Britain.[124] One of the British government's schemes post-1945 was to invite immigrants to the country who it was hoped would then naturally become culturally 'British' by the second generation, largely losing links to their past home.[125] The reality was rather different, with immigrants often either choosing or being forced through poverty to live in areas where most residents were of similar ethnicity or religion. In major British cities, a ghettoisation of certain races and religions occurred. Multiculturalism was a policy developed in response to these tensions, defined by Tariq Modood as 'the recognition of group differences within the public sphere of laws, policies, democratic discourses and the terms of a shared citizenship and national identity'.[126] He adds that 'it was felt that migrants should be able to retain their distinct cultures while the adapted [...] to their new countries'.[127] The British policy of multiculturalism tried to teach respect for different cultures, whilst promoting a separatist agenda which allowed communities based predominantly on ethnicity to flourish.

However, tensions between immigrant communities and the wider British population grew, and in 2001 the decision was made by the government to investigate an alternative to multiculturalism as a strategy. Events came to a head during the 2001 riots in the Northern British towns of Bradford, Burnley and Oldham, where tensions between British Asian communities and the wider white British population turned to violence. This galvanised the Labour government to change

[124] Roger Hewitt, *White Backlash and the Politics of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
[125] Ali Rattansi, *Multiculturalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
[126] Tariq Modood, *Multiculturalism: A Civic Idea* (London: Polity Press, 2007), p. 3.
[127] Modood, p. 4.

its policy.[128] They set up a review, led by Ted Cantle, to examine the causes of the race riots and suggest new policies.[129] It was this report which developed the notion of 'community cohesion', suggesting that British community structures (notably not governmental ones) were the cause and the potential solution to race tensions. The report recommended a rejection of multiculturalism for the idea of the 'cohesive community', defined as one where '[t]here is common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities, [whilst t]he diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued'.[130] This description, produced by a group of researchers who were independent from the government, echoes Sennett's imagining of a dialogical community (valuing difference within a community, without denying an overall sense of grouping, for example). What was not made explicit, however, was what these set of common values were and how the appreciation of different backgrounds might work in practice.

As 'community cohesion' moved from philosophical notion to practical application, the definition became further complicated. The London bombings in 2005 caused the Government to focus more and more on extremism in the Muslim community. The Department of Communities and Local Government was created by Tony Blair in May 2006, along with the new cabinet position of Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, emphasising the government's belief in the importance of community. Ted Cantle, the author of the original community cohesion report, recalls that the new department added a new working definition to community cohesion shortly after its creation, which stated that

> community cohesion is what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together. A key contributor to community cohesion is integration

[128] *Identity, Ethnic Diversity and Community Cohesion*, ed. by Robert Berkeley, Michelynn Laflèche, and Margaret Wetherell (London: Sage, 2007), p. 53.
[129] Ted Cantle, 'About Community Cohesion', 2001 <http://tedcantle.co.uk/about-community-cohesion/> [accessed 22 March 2017].
[130] Cantle, p. 1.

> which is what must happen to enable new residents and existing residents to adjust to one another.[131]

This definition further obfuscates the idea of community cohesion; it leaves out the insistence on mutual respect for difference, and vaguely highlights 'integration' and adjustment as key.[132]

This shift in definition from one which includes the respecting of difference to one that focuses more on integration and unity, reflects the burgeoning of debates about Britishness and immigration in Britain during the 2000s. What 'Britain' represents has been in the headlines since 1997, when both Scotland and Wales had voted to create their own devolved parliaments, and the stage was set for the 2014 Scottish referendum for complete independence from England (which narrowly voted no to independence by 55.3% to 44.7%). When Poland joined the EU in 2004, the British government radically underestimated the number of predicted migrants from the country into Britain, meaning 'resident communities in particularly affected areas were woefully unprepared for the volume of migration they experienced'.[133] Further immigration took place from Romania and Bulgaria when they joined the EU in 2007, and Croatia in 2013. Liz Tomlin states that

> [t]he public hostility to asylum seekers and economic migrants, stoked by right-wing press, and particularly evident in economically disadvantaged communities who saw themselves in direct competition with the newcomers for housing and other resources, led to a rise in popularity for Britain's right-wing parties and a swing to the right by mainstream parties in an attempt to appease public opinion.[134]

[131] Cantle, p. 2.
[132] Berkeley, Laflèche, and Wetherell.
[133] Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 593.
[134] Tomlin, p. 10.

This shift to the right is reflected in the changing, politically sanctioned meaning of 'community cohesion' – one that privileges working towards a national unity rather that one accepting cultural difference. Whilst the sudden increase in migrants from Syria, its neighbouring countries and some Muslim-majority countries occurred in 2015, and the referendum vote to leave the European Union of 2016 took place after the productions considered in this thesis, these events have only meant that debates surrounding Britishness and immigration continue with ever-increasing intensity.

'Community cohesion' as a concept was also spotlighted in the continued fight against terrorism, particularly Islamism. In *Modern British Playwriting 2000*-2009, Dan Rebellato argues that '[t]he 2000s sees an intensification of global terrorism [...] [which is often founded on the belief] that Western global hegemony needs to be resisted in the name of Islam'. In Britain, the July bombings of 2005 further heightened racial tension in British cities.[135] The 2008 global financial crash, leading to austerity measures by the government, meant that the competition for jobs and resources increased. The general election of 2010 saw David Cameron lead a coalition between the Conservative and Liberal Democrats, continuing and extending the policy of austerity. All these factors affected the way in which 'community cohesion' was practiced. Tomlin suggests that

> Community cohesion was less about all communities finding common ground and establishing shared values by mutual compromise and tolerance, and much more about specific communities (Muslims) adopting the cultural practices and values that were authorised by the government as desirable and British [... T]he ideological basis of the community cohesion project ensured that when government funding was made available to promote wider access to cultural activities for black, Asian and minority ethnic communities,

[135] Dan Rebellato, *Modern British Playwriting: 2000-2009 Voices, Documents, New Interpretations* (London: A&C Black, 2013), p. 6.

> it was done with the clear understanding that only the 'right kind' of cultural development should be supported.[136]

As Ric Knowles has recounted, the term community has been used to support an inclusionist /exclusionist agenda of the neoliberal right. The popularisation of the term 'community cohesion' in British public discourse has meant that a clear definition of community has become impossible, but that the term itself has become inextricably bound up with wider contemporary debates about Britishness, identity, immigration and nationhood.

Knowles suggests that theatre companies, understanding this, think that the term is 'only good for grant applications and web sites'.[137] Certainly, the use of the word community seen on the Arts Council England website, directing theatre companies in how to apply for funding, is decidedly imprecise. ACE listed 'work within the community' as a key aim in the portfolio admissions statement 2011.[138] ACE's website also consolidates the link between community and ethnicity related above, giving the following definition of what they mean by 'ethnicity':

> Ethnicity: A strict definition of an ethnic group is a group regarded as a distinct community by virtue of certain essential characteristics - a shared history which distinguishes it from other groups and a cultural tradition of its own. Sikhs and Gypsies are examples. However, it has come to have a broader meaning and the expression 'ethnic monitoring' is used in reference to groups defined by colour, race or national origin as well.[139]

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[136] Tomlin, p. 22.
[137] Knowles, 'Improvisation', p. 3.
[138] Arts Council England, 'The National Portfolio in Depth', 2010 <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/national-portfolio-funding/national-portfolio-depth/> [accessed 12 June 2013].
[139] Arts Council England, 'National Portfolio Briefing Notes 2015', 2015, p. 52 <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/National-portfolio-briefing-note_Mar-2015.pdf> [accessed 22 March 2017].

ACE do state that this definition is taken from the centre for equality and human rights; is not written by them directly; but the definition's insistence that an ethnic group is 'distinct' and has 'essential' characteristics seems to reinscribe the sense of distinction and alienation that some ethnic minorities feel within British society.

Community cohesion linked the ideas of immigration, extremism and ethnicity directly to that of community in the public consciousness, without offering a clear notion of what the term might actually mean in social practice. Public debate about the notion of community in contemporary Britain, and about what a British 'nation' might be, has increased, but remains inconclusive. The United Kingdom Independence Party gained electoral support in the 2013 local elections and 2014 European elections, though their popularity has declined since their central campaign against Britain's membership of the European Union was 'won' in the referendum of 2016. Donald Trump's election as President of the United States in 2016, and his drive to 'Make America Great Again', is another example of the move to exclusionist and nation-centered policy making. 'Britishness' as a concept has been further debated in the referendum on Britain's membership of the EU and the resulting 'Brexit'. There is a troubling trend of new nationalism, stoked by austerity and immigration, and by social media where 'news' can be manipulated.

This thesis argues that Gray's theatre for ATC proposes and debates workable structures of community: it has proposed structures that might allow for difference and dissent within communities, rather than falling back on an imagined concept of a unified community. Whilst *The Events* deals explicitly with the threat to community by terrorism, all of the productions considered here, I suggest, posit alternatives to a facile insistence on community cohesion. In the context of a contemporary Britain whose recent governments have suggested that cohesion can be insisted upon, ATC's work has repeatedly staged communities that make, remake and debate themselves.

Chapter Two: The Transition from Bijan Sheibani to Ramin Gray

A Short History of ATC

ATC, or Actors Touring Company, is forty years old in 2018. It was founded by John Retallack and Dick McCaw as 'Attic Touring Company' to 'specialise in the use of movement and mime technique in adapting novels and narrative verse poems'.[140] Over the last four decades the company has had seven different artistic directors, and produced over sixty separate productions.

Its success is demonstrated by the fact that it has consistently received core funding from the Arts Council of Great Britain or ACE since 1983. The differing interests and expertise of the artistic directors has informed the work of the company, however three major artistic principles inform most of its repertoire. Firstly, as a small-scale touring company, a pared down and lean aesthetic is a necessity, but all ATC productions have embraced this necessity and used it to feed their work: it is something key to their practice. They all experiment with simple, non-naturalistic stage design, encouraging the imaginative input from the audience to 'piece out' their staging with their thoughts.[141]

Secondly, ATC's work is text-centered, but not simply in the sense that its productions are based on dramatic texts. ATC's early work focussed on devising pieces from so-called 'classic' or 'canonical' British and European texts. The first three artistic directors, John Retallack (1978-86), Mark Brickman (1986-88) and Ceri Sherlock (1989-92), focussed on producing work from an array of such classic texts, editing and adapting the works, sometimes through experimentation in the rehearsal room: what would be now described as 'devising' work. They mainly focused on creating productions inspired by European classical texts, by authors such as Corneille, Moliere, Lope de

[140] Actors Touring Company, 'Call Out for New Artistic Director', 1992, Victoria and Albert Museum Archives.
[141] William Shakespeare, *King Henry V* (London: Methuen, 1995), pt. Prologue.

Vega, Schnitzler, Goethe, Gombrowicz, Jarry, Ibsen and Musil, along with some productions of Shakespeare. Retallack founded the company by devising two plays – *Don Juan* Parts 1 and 2 (1978) – based on Byron's text, and consolidated this process in later productions. Brickman and Sherlock continued this mode of creation, with Sherlock employing two dramaturges to support him on de Marivaux's *The Triumph of Love* (1989).[142]

ATC's relationship to text began to change during the artistic directorship of Nick Philippou (1992-2000), when ATC began commissioning writers to translate European texts for the company, and then began to commission playwrights to completely rewrite canonical texts. Thus the company gradually developed a reputation and an expertise in producing new writing, as it does today.[143] The company produced more provocative, experimental reworkings of British and European classic literature. Notable was Philippou's relationship with Mark Ravenhill, who was commissioned twice to work with ATC: first, his 1997 rewriting of Goethe's *Faust* set in the 1990s, and then his 1998 *Handbag* (1998), a radical rewriting of Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Through these new commissions and productions, Philippou began ATC's championing of new writing, whilst the company simultaneously remained true to its history of reworking classic texts. Under Gordon Anderson's artistic directorship (2001-2006) no new texts were commissioned, however a wide range of contemporary European plays were produced which consolidated ATC's image as a company which produces international new writing, such as Roland Schimmelpfennig's *Arabian Nights* (2002) and Mark Schultz's *A Brief History of Helen of Troy* (2005).

Bijan Sheibani's directorship built on this legacy and extended it. His choice of *The Brothers Size* by Tarell Alvin McCraney (2007 and 2008) and *Eurydice* by Sarah Ruhl (2010) were both examples of new writing based on mythic narratives: Yoruba cosmology in the former, Greek mythology in the later. He also directed *Gone Too Far!* by Bola Agbaje (2008), a new writing piece,

[142] Actors Touring Company, 'The Triumph of Love Programme', 1989, Victoria and Albert Museum Archives, (not yet catalogued).
[143] Indeed, in Liz Tomlin, *British Theatre Companies: 1995-2014* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 92 ATC is erroneously listed as a new writing company with an incorrect creation date of 1986.

and *Ghosts, or Those Who Return* (2009), a rewriting of Henrik Ibsen's play by Rebecca Lenkiewicz. Ramin Gray's present directorship has supported new writing from Germany (*The Golden Dragon* which toured 2011-12 and *Winter Solstice* which toured during 2017 and 2018 by Roland Schimmelpfennig, *Martyr* which toured in 2015 by Marius von Mayenburg), Greece (*The Suppliant Woman* which toured 2016, 2017 and 2018) by Aeschylus in a new version by David Greig), and Russia (*Illusions* by Ivan Viripaev, which toured 2012 and 2013). Gray's directorship continues to develop the third major aspect of ATC productions: its engagement with Europe.

As I have recounted, from the outset ATC engaged with European culture, and I want to suggest that this is ATC's third defining feature. Retallack and Brickman used classic European texts as a springboard to create new work, whilst Anderson and Gray have championed contemporary European writers and non-naturalistic performance styles. What constitutes a British or a European theatre practice is highly contested, but Jen Harvie has written persuasively about the false dichotomy between ideas of British and European theatre practice: the first considered writerly, focusing on language, the second considered to create work more focussed on the body, often using devising techniques and rejecting naturalism. Harvie takes a more positive approach to this supposed British theatre problem and dedicates a whole chapter in *Staging the UK* to describing the histories and practices of theatre companies which problematise this distinction.[144] She suggests that theatre academy '...[pays] grossly disproportionate attention to [the literary] aspect of British theatre to the neglect of others, ... [representing] British theatre as autonomous and uniquely literary'.[145] She uses the examples of DV8 Physical Theatre and Complicité, which she argues engage with European performance histories to

[144] Jen Harvie, *Staging the UK* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).
[145] Harvie, *Staging the UK*, pp. 113–14.

> [...] demonstrate the creative scope of a healthily heterogeneous, miscegenated theatre genealogy and its benefits as a means of negotiating British identities not as distinct from European ones but precisely as – multiple and dynamic – European identities.[146]

The binary disputed by Harvie still emerges in debates about British theatre, however. David Hare recently asserted that European 'theatre makers' made 'over-aestheticised' work and 'all that directorial stuff that we've managed to keep over on the continent is now coming over and beginning to infect our theatre'.[147] ATC's third key feature, an engagement with the European, is another example of British theatre history which problematises this dichotomy. Much in the way I will argue that Gray's work for ATC problamatises ideas of community based on simplistic ideals of unity, ATC as a company has never seen the British theatre community as a unified, culturally specific grouping but has embraced many different working patterns and drawn on many different cultures of performance to produce its work.[148]

ATC's history also reflects the popularity and strong funding base for devised theatre in the early 1980s. This history offers an interesting counter to the one projected in Michael Billington's *State of the Nation*, which focuses on the realist state-of-the-nation plays of the 1970s and 1980s.[149] As early as 1996, Philippou was using video and dance within his production of *Venus + Adonis*, an example of what Hare would probably describe as over-astheticised European practice. Anderson and Gray's work on European contemporary texts celebrates the textual expertise of Europe and challenges the notion that British writing is unsurpassed, whilst using non-naturalistic and experimental techniques in performance which are supposedly European in origin. In the ongoing

[146] Harvie, *Staging the UK*, p. 114.
[147] Dalya Alberge, 'David Hare: Classic British Drama Is "Being Infected" by Radical European Staging', *Observer*, 9 January 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/jan/29/david-hare-classic-british-drama-infected-radical-european-staging> [accessed 13 March 2017].
[148] For further discussion of European performance techniques, please see: Jen Harvie and Andy Lavender, *Making Contemporary Theatre: International Rehearsal Processes* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010); Maria M Delgado and Dan Rebellato, *Contemporary European Theatre Directors* (London: Routledge, 2010).
[149] Michael Billington, *State of the Nation: British Theatre Since 1945* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009).

debates about British identity and Britain's relationship with Europe (and the EU in particular), ATC's work offers another case-study of Harvie's 'healthily heterogeneous, miscegenated theatre' to inform how we might imagine a healthily heterogeneous, miscegenated sense of Britishness.[150] The three major facets of ATC's work I have recounted - its pared down aesthetic, its text-inspired work and its European outlook - have informed all the work that has been produced under its name.

Developing the Project: The AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award with ATC

When I applied for the Arts and Humanities Research Council collaborative doctoral award in 2010, the parameters of my research had already been sketched out for me. Unusually for Arts and Humanities PhD research applications, but customarily for this type of award, my application responded to a pre-written outline detailing the kinds of questions and research the successful candidate would tackle. This outline was created by my primary supervisor, Professor Bridget Escolme, and the team at ATC (then-artistic director Bijan Sheibani and then-producer Hannah Bentley), and focussed on ATC's recent successes

> [...] in attracting a range of new audiences to its work: young, black British audiences in particular. The project explore[d] the kinds of dramatic structures, performance venues and outreach work that engage these audiences.[151]

The project was initially entitled *Cultures of Spectatorship: The Relationship between Dramaturgy, Site, Outreach and Audience in the Work of ATC*, which offered a wide scope for potential research and investigation. In particular, the company had recently moved to the border of Hackney and

[150] Harvie, *Staging the UK*, p. 114.
[151] Bijan Sheibani and Bridget Escolme, 'Further Particulars AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award Queen Mary University of London and Actors Touring Company (ATC) Cultures of Spectatorship: The Relationship between Dramaturgy, Site, Outreach and Audience in the Work of ATC', 2009.

Tower Hamlets to engage with the local audience demographic, reflecting the 'young, black British' audiences it had successfully developed through its earlier projects, *The Brothers Size* (first produced with the Young Vic in 2007) and *Gone Too Far!* (first produced with the Royal Court in 2007).[152] The proposal included research to discover

- What impact theatre had had on 'communities in Hackney and Tower Hamlets' in recent years ;

- 'What [had] been the nature of theatre work taking place in those communities?',

And

- 'How [could] audiences for theatre be developed from within communities not traditionally engaged with the form?'.[153]

The term 'community' appeared in the proposal seven times, but the exact definition of what or who these 'communities' was not defined.

However, just as I began my work with the company, Sheibani announced his resignation as Artistic Director of the company. Hannah Bentley the Executive Director resigned in February 2011, after she had seen through the company's ACE National Portfolio Organisation application through to success, and Kendal O'Neill the Administrator and Events Manager left soon after. As the collaboration enabled me to work closely with the company and to sit in on rehearsals and office discussions about policy, the focus of the doctoral project logically changed to the work of the next Artistic Director, Ramin Gray, with whom I worked with from his appointment at the end of 2010

[152] Tarell Alvin McCraney, *The Brothers Size* (London: Faber & Faber, 2007); Bola Agbaje, *Gone Too Far!* (London: Methuen, 2008).
[153] Sheibani and Escolme.

until 2016. The change in directorship gave me an unrivalled opportunity to watch Gray's work develop from his very first meetings at the company, and the three first productions he created form the case-studies of this thesis. The evolution of this project was incremental; as Gray experimented and developed as the director of ATC, so I experimented and developed my research alongside him. Gray's directorial style, both in the rehearsal room and in the office, was markedly different to Sheibani's. Hannah Bentley, the Executive Producer, remained long enough for me to talk to her about the thinking behind Sheibani's leadership of the company, and what his own hopes for ATC's future had been. I also was able to talk directly to Sheibani at times.

Next, I will demonstrate the significant differences between how Sheibani and Gray ran ATC, focussing on their ideas about what 'community' means in terms of directing, performance, participation work and company ethos. There are significant similarities between the two directors: they have strikingly similar backgrounds and both embraced non-naturalistic forms of performance during their tenures with ATC. However, I argue that Sheibani and his team's enthusiasm to encourage the involvement of more young, black British spectators with the company meant they focussed their energies on developing a large participation programme, and developed productions which broadly reflected a positive and optimistic view of contemporary community in Britain (even while carefully depicting their complexities, as in the 2007 *Gone Too Far!*).[154] In contrast, Gray and his team cut ATC's participation programme in order to focus on the core artistic work of the company. Under Gray, pre- and post-performance events relating to issues in the performances were constructed to encourage debate and audience response, rather than to build new 'community' audiences. Discussion about the productions over social media and blogging about productions was actively encouraged by ATC under Gray, and members of the public were allowed in to watch rehearsals and give their thoughts (often recorded for YouTube and published for the duration of the run). Gray's productions reflected this spirit of debate and enquiry, often focussing on uncomfortable subjects and offering no apparent resolution to challenging questions.

[154] Agbaje.

Theories of community offer productive entryways into understanding the differences between the two directors' approaches. Gray's conception of community bears similarities to Mouffe's antagonistic democracy and Nancy's inoperative community which I have described above, where dissent and disagreement is seen as productive and indeed essential to the working of community.[155] Sheibani's conception of community is more difficult to theorise. It is closely related to Sennett's conception of the dialogic, where antagonism is less important than the ability to listen and compliment the people around you, but also occasionally bears resemblance to the 'romantic' community that Joseph's work critiques, or the 'safe' space which Bauman sees as inevitable but idealistic concept of community in the post-modern world.[156] However, Sheibani's work was far from naively optimistic or productive of worryingly essentialist, politically conservative notions of community; thus the theatre can productively speak back to the binaries produced by critical theory.

Bijan Sheibani: Artistic Director of ATC 2007-2010

Like Ramin Gray, Bijan Sheibani is a British-born Anglo-Iranian director who studied at the University of Oxford before beginning his career as a theatre director – although Sheibani began his career some twenty years after Gray. After taking an MA in Advanced Theatre Practice at the Central School of Music and Drama, Sheibani became a freelance theatre director, and worked at Battersea Arts Centre, Soho Theatre and Southwark Playhouse between 2002 and 2006. Here he directed work by well-known twentieth century writers - Pinter, Bond and Beckett - but also worked on new writing by Laura Wade (who went on to write the award winning *Posh*), Lydia Adetunji and David Dipper. In 2003, he worked as assistant director to Ramin Gray at the Royal Court Theatre, on the Russian new writing play *Terrorism* by the Preshnikov Brothers, one of his first professional positions.

[155] Mouffe, 'Art and Democracy'; Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*.
[156] Joseph; Bauman, *Community*.

His production of *Gone Too Far!* by Bola Agbaje at the Royal Court Theatre, during the new writer's festival in 2007, was critically acclaimed and was instrumental in his being appointed the new Artistic Director of ATC later that year.[157] At ATC he made two significant changes from Gordon Anderson's previous management: he started to tour again and to collaborate internationally, and he developed a new education programme for the company.[158] His first year at ATC set the tone with a touring production of *The Brothers Size* by Tarell Alvin McCraney, a young black American writer who is currently best known for writing the story upon which the Oscar-winning 2016 film *Moonlight* was based.[159] ATC collaborated with the Young Vic and embarked on a short tour in 2007. It was so well received that it was revived with a new cast in 2008 for an international tour. It was taken to Teatre Lliure as part of the Grec Festival in Barcelona, Spain and Talimhane Tiyatrosu (the Istanbul Arcola) in Turkey. He then revived his acclaimed *Gone Too Far!* by touring the production to East London venues to find a different audience to that of affluent Sloane Square: The Albany and the Hackney Empire.

Sheibani's artistic eclecticism was demonstrated by his next production, a new translation of *Ghosts, or Those Who Return*, by Henrik Ibsen and translated by Rebecca Lenkiewicz in 2009, and shown at the Arcola in Dalston, East London.[160] His final production for the company was *Eurydice*, a play by American writer Sarah Ruhl, and was a contemporary reimagining of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth.[161] This production toured the UK in 2010 and returned to the Grec Festival in Barcelona at the end of the run. Two further productions were mounted by different directors: Ellen McDougal directed a 2011 UK tour of *Ivan and the Dogs* by Hattie Naylor, while Caroline Steinbeis

[157] Agbaje.
[158] The previous ATC Artistic Director, Gordon Anderson, had decided to focus on UK-based touring and did not instigate an education programme.
[159] McCraney.
[160] Henrik Ibsen, *Ghosts, or, Those Who Return*, trans. by Rebecca Lenkiewicz (London: Faber and Faber, 2009).
[161] Sarah Ruhl, *Eurydice* (London: Methuen, 2010).

directed a production called *Fatherland* by Tom Holloway in 2011, with a short run at the Gate Theatre.[162]

Bijan Sheibani: Directing and Performance

Whilst I have suggested that Sheibani's programming looks eclectic, in several interviews he explained an underlying connection. Talking about his first three productions, he stated that '[...] they are [...] all about family: how much family bonds can withstand [...] It's amazing to me that all three playwrights ask the same questions'.[163] His belief in the power of theatre's capacity to create and interrogate personal and vital bonds between people can also be seen in his enthusiasm for theatre education work beyond the productions themselves. In a press statement in 2009 he described his experiences working on the *Gone Too Far!* revival:

> [...] the thrill for me was seeing the audience's response, and particularly the participation of the young people in the work and the events we ran alongside the production. These included a youth forum addressing the urgent issue of knife crime, which packed out the Hackney Empire, and a writing workshop led by Bola Agbaje [...] It is an exciting time for me personally and for ATC as a company as we establish ourselves in our new East London home.[164]

When I interviewed Sheibani shortly after he announced his resignation in 2010, I asked him what he hoped the AHRC doctoral collaboration might achieve. He rearticulated his interest in theatre's

[162] Hattie Naylor, *Ivan and the Dogs* (London: Methuen, 2010); Tom Holloway, *Fatherland* (London: Oberon Books, 2011).
[163] Claire Allfree, 'Riding the Ghost Train', *Metro*, 21 July 2009 <https://metro.co.uk/2009/07/21/riding-the-ghost-train-281738/> [accessed 21 March 2014].
[164] Actors Touring Company, 'Press Release: Bijan Sheibani's 2010 Season for ATC', 2009, ATC Office Digital Files.

capacity to create and represent bonds and specifically framed it in terms of community; he said that his interest stemmed from his efforts to encourage more people from ethnic minority backgrounds to attend his work. His key questions were 'Why is it so difficult to engage with people from these backgrounds?' and 'How do you create a theatre audience community which reflects the real diversity of the London population?'.[165] He then stated:

> [...] I am interested in the religious experience of community which occurs when people come together for a theatre performance. The kind of thing which Peter Brook describes as 'The Holy Theatre' [...] I notice when I watch my own work that I become part of that community. There was a marked difference between the final technical rehearsal for *Gone Too Far!* and the first night in terms of atmosphere.[166]

Sheibani here references Peter Brook's concept of the 'Holy Theatre', taken from *The Empty Space*, a text which remains fundamental to many directors who trained in the second half of the twentieth century.[167] Brook's Holy Theatre is visceral, minimalist and emphasises the physicality of the actors and the body in the production of meaning. Brook describes naturalism as 'deadly theatre', and advises overthrowing the primacy of the text, to focus on actors and the direct involvement of the spectators. Brook advocates a theatre which

> [...] could be called The Theatre of the Invisible-Made-Visible: the notion that the stage is a place where the invisible can appear has a deep hold on our thoughts ... many audiences all over the world will answer positively from their own experience that they have seen the face

[165] Interview with Bijan Sheibani at The National Theatre, 2010.
[166] 'Interview with Bijan Sheibani at The National Theatre'.
[167] Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: Penguin, 2008).

of the invisible through an experience on the stage that transcended their experience in life.[168]

Brook describes a pseudo-religious experience wherein the unknown and unseen are made palpable in the moment of theatre. As his chapter on Holy Theatre progresses, he imagines this transcendent power to overcome language, culture and history: it is a staunchly liberal humanist figuring of a humanity able to imagine together across history and cultures. He later states that Holy Theatre is understood by 'those in every country who do not set up intellectual barriers, who do not try too hard to analyse the message': analytical reasoning undermines the instinctual understanding of the 'message'.[169] In invoking the idea of the 'Holy', Brook imagines his theatre in the image of Western Christianity's act of communion, wherein 'the actor [as priest] invokes, lays bare what lies in every man [the audience and lay-people] - and what daily life covers up'.[170] His essentialist depiction of humanity, and of how this humanity can be represented in the act of theatre, works uneasily with the culturally specific analogy of the Christian priest and congregation.

Sheibani's citation of Brook and his vision of transcendence and community has parallels with the idea of the unified, romantic community deconstructed by Nancy and Blanchot: Brook and Sheibani's belief in the ability to create complete communion between people through this theatre is undoubtedly idealistic.[171] But their idealism is also understandable; it recalls Bauman's empathetic portrayal of the desire for safety through communion in the post-modern world.[172] Brook's Holy Theatre, and Sheibani's interest in it, also bears comparison with the conception of community interrogated by Nancy and Joseph.[173] As I discussed in Chapter One, Nancy connects nostalgia for community with a mythical idealism about the past and 'the natural family, the Athenian city, the

[168] Brook, pp. 47–48.
[169] Brook, p. 66.
[170] Brook, p. 67.
[171] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*; Blanchot.
[172] Bauman, *Community*.
[173] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*; Joseph.

Roman Republic, the first Christian community'.[174] Sheibani's work for ATC is striking in its use of mythological structures: *The Brothers* Size is essentially a rewriting of Nigerian Yoruba mythological narratives, and *Eurydice* is direct adaptation of the Greek myth Orpheus and Eurydice. Although he did not direct it, Sheibani programmed *Ivan and the Dogs* as one of the final productions of his directorship, which interprets the real-life story of a young Russian boy living with wolves in the 1990s and is structured as a present day myth.

The Brothers Size was staged in the round, and the actors directly addressed the audience to explain the setting or the time of day for each scene they were about to enact. A musician sat at the side of the stage to produce all the sound effects, so the audience could watch him work. Lighting was used to indicate the time of day, whether scenes were indoor or outdoor, but there were no props or scene-specific settings. The prologue acted as a ritual to appease the namesake gods of the three characters: Ogun, god of war and iron, Oshoosi, the wanderer, and Elegba, who represents the crossroads. During this ritual, the space was prepared for performance: a chalk circle was drawn by Elegba to mark the space in which the action would take place, to make the space into a literal (and later metaphorical) crossroads for the characters. The set design and dramaturgy were both influenced by traditional Yoruba theatre, a non-mimetic tradition using techniques of stylisation and ritualisation, a non-realist theatre that draws attention to its performed nature.[175] The story sees the reunion of the Size brothers (Ogun and Oshoosi), and depicts how Ogun ultimately saves his brother from the tempting, nefarious deeds of Elegba. The characters speak in prose-poetry, heightening the other-worldly ritualistic feel of the piece.

Eurydice, by celebrated American writer Sarah Ruhl, had its European premiere at the Plymouth Drum Theatre on Thursday 25 February 2010. This was the last play directed by Bijan Shebani for the company, who announced his resignation later that year. Before he left, Bijan and

[174] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 13.
[175] Biodun Jeyifo, *The Yoruba Popular Travelling Theatre of Nigeria* (Abuja: Dept. of Culture, Federal Ministry of Social Development, Youth, Sports & Culture, 1984).

ATC had commissioned a production of a new script called *Ivan and the Dogs* by Hattie Naylor, to be directed by ATC's artistic associate Ellen McDougall. Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice* and Hatty Naylor's *Ivan and the Dogs* both have similar mythical undertones to *The Brothers Size*. *Eurydice* is a modern retelling of the Greek myth, told from Eurydice's point of view. Orpheus appears in the play, but the main male protagonist is Eurydice's father who she meets in the underworld. The play focuses on the choice Eurydice has to make between staying in Hades with her father or returning to earth to her husband. At the play's dénouement, it is Eurydice who calls out and causes Orpheus to look back to her, and thus he loses her to Hades forever. *Ivan and the Dogs* is a play written as a monologue for one actor, detailing the true story of four-year-old Ivan Mishukov. Ivan ran away from his troubled home life during the Russian financial crisis of the 1990s. Out on the freezing Moscow streets, he was adopted by a pack of wild dogs that ensured his survival by helping him find food and keeping him warm at night. The Russian authorities tried several times to capture the child but he was always protected by his pack of dogs. Finally, after almost two years, Ivan was caught: the authorities killed his dogs, allowing them to take Ivan and send him to an orphanage.

This triad of productions all emphasised the mythic in their subject matter, but also in the dramaturgical techniques used. The texts are richly poetic and the actors directly addressed the audience at times. All three productions centred on innocent or child-like characters, whose naivety is structured to foster a sense of parental protectiveness in the audience and reinforce the desire for safety and security. These psycho-dramatic fairytales/myths were offered as something essential and innate to humanity: they are tales of love, loss and redemption. Each of the productions provocatively used actors who looked or sounded Other to the traditional white British middle-class audiences that still predominate in London theatres: black British actors in the cases of *The Brothers Size* and *Eurydice*, and a Russian actor with a thick accent in *Ivan and the Dogs*. Casting and themes also worked to bring in audiences who would not traditionally go to the theatre by using black British actors, Nigerian mythology or recent Russian history as connection points, whilst simultaneously giving the more traditional audiences the hook of a mythological theatrical narrative they too could

engage with. All productions had a stylistically minimal set, with non-naturalistic lighting and musical elements, often performed in the round and with actors talking straight to the audience.

Sheibani developed a style of metadramatic, minimalist, prose-poetry infused theatre which seemed to always rest on the edge of mythological. I suggest that his productions are examples of what Jill Dolan describes as an utopian theatre, where '[a]udiences form temporary communities, sites of public discourse that, along with the intense experiences of utopian performatives, can model new investments in and interactions with variously constituted public spheres'.[176] Dolan's work is politically optimistic; she focuses on the kinds of performances which 'inspire moments in which the audience feels allied with each other, and with a broader, more capacious sense of public in which social discourse articulates the possible rather than the insurmountable obstacles to human potential'.[177] She celebrates moments of unity, seeing them as politically productive. Her argument, however, does not allow for dissent or discrepancy in audience response, and relies, I would suggest, on a romanticised version of community based on a liberal humanist understanding of humankind. Dolan's idealism connects with Bauman's idea of the need for safety through the concept of community in the post-modern world.

In the development of ATC's mission statements about the work of the company, similar themes emerge. ATC's mission statement, printed in the text of *The Brothers Size*, reflects an optimistic desire to create work for a 'wide audience' which 'everyone will want to see', for those 'across the world,' and to create 'dynamic partnerships', 'bringing together' different artists whilst 'encouraging collaboration'.[178] In the text of *Ghosts or Those Who Return* in 2009 the vision was extended to describe work which was 'cohesive, provocative and entertaining', suggesting a sense of safety in community cohesion: work which joins together.[179] In the text for *Eurydice*, there is a page

[176] Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), p. 10.
[177] Dolan, p. 2.
[178] McCraney.
[179] Ibsen.

about the celebration of ATC's 30th birthday, congratulating everyone involved. The note details the collaborative and supportive atmosphere of the company, and ends by saying:

> [a]nd so we hope that you will join us as we continue to bring you work that aims to delight, move, and inspire. From all of us at ATC.[180]

The note is not just signed by Sheibani, but the 'us' of ATC as a community.

I would like to emphasise that while Sheibani's work is often utopian in Dolan's sense, it also offers internal debate and dissimilarity, albeit in a gentle and non-confrontational way. Michael Billington described *Gone Too Far!* as work which counters the 'myth of the black community', and describes the way

> [the] final image, in which Yemi dons traditional African attire while jauntily sporting a baseball-cap, implies that it possible both to acknowledge one's origins and assimilate to urban, westernised culture. It is this notion of the potential for dual identity that gives the play its ray of hope. [181]

Sheibani's hopeful idealism does not sidestep problems of integration entirely. In fact, Sheibani sees a direct link between music and theatre, which recalls Sennett's understanding of the dialogic:

[180] Ruhl.
[181] Michael Billington, 'Gone Too Far!', *Guardian*, 29 July 2008 <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2008/jul/29/gonetoofar> [accessed 4 October 2018].

> Directing's often like playing music, in the way that you have to interpret a piece of music – you have to understand the rhythm of it, and the structure of it. I'm using a similar muscle when directing – particularly with Pinter, who has an incredible musicality.[182]

In this conception, Sheibani is the MD / rehearsal leader and the actors are the musicians who in performance create harmony without the overarching leadership of a conductor. Sennett recognises just such dialogic interaction in a string quartet (Sennett himself used to be a professional musician) describing the way 'musicians [...] need to interact [...] to cooperate to make art'.[183]

Sheibani, ATC and Participation Work

ATC's company structure also conformed to the familial, community atmosphere Sheibani sought in his productions. When I joined the company, I was impressed by the dedication of, and friendship between, Sheibani and his executive director Hannah Bentley, and the administrator and events manager Kendall O'Neill, who create a welcoming atmosphere for me: it felt as though I was joining a family as well as a production team.

The garden in which we sat on my first day, convivially eating tea and pastries, was attached to the 'Tab Centre' in East London, a location the team had only recently moved to. They all had been instrumental in moving the company from its central London home to this 'vibrant, community driven space' in 2008, in order to concentrate their participation work in this area.[184] The centre backed on to Saint Leonard's church, East Shoreditch, the setting for the fictional inner city church of

[182] Laura Barnett, 'Bijan Sheibani: "Directing's like Playing Music; You Must Get the Rhythm"', *Guardian*, 25 April 2011 <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/apr/25/bijan-sheibani-harold-pinter-donmar> [accessed 19 June 2018].
[183] Sennett, p. 18.
[184] 'The Tab Centre', *The Tab Church: Shoreditch Tabernacle Baptist Church & Centre in Shoreditch, East London* <http://www.tabcentre.com/> [accessed 4 May 2015].

Saint Saviours in the Marshes in the BBC comedy series *Rev* (a series portraying the 'deep need for community and social interdependency, under siege in our stressed and straitened times', albeit with a humorous edge).[185] They were particularly interested in what impact the company was having on these communities in Hackney and Tower Hamlets, especially as the London 2012 Olympic games loomed large and these boroughs were marked as 'Growth Boroughs'.[186] ATC was committed to being a part of the Olympic regeneration programme, of which, according to the growth boroughs website '[t]he most enduring legacy of the Olympics will; *[sic]* be the regeneration of an entire community for the direct benefit of everyone who lives there.'[187] The Tab Centre was in constant use by other local community groups, including AA meetings, yoga classes and coffee mornings for older residents. ATC was literally embedding itself into the local community as well as exploring the inclusion of community in its programming.

When I joined the office, it was clear that ATC's participation work was as important as their productions: office conversations seem to revolve more closely around the participants on the participatory projects rather than the theatre productions themselves. Sheibani's programme of socially engaged work alongside his professional productions, called 'Spin Offs', also conformed to this model of welcoming, inclusive community. As part of this programme, ATC ran *Are You Afraid of Ghosts?* – a variety of free intergenerational workshops at the Arcola theatre, run by Rikki Henry, Assistant Director on *Ghosts or Those Who Return*. These acting workshops for local people focused on the intergenerational relationships that were central to *Ghosts or Those Who Return*. During the Bristol run of *Eurydice*, ATC produced *Project Underworld*, a project for emerging directors, who worked with regional writers from Bristol to produce two short pieces of work in response to *Eurydice*, involving 10 performers age 16+ selected from the Bristol Old Vic Young Company. Another example of this kind of participation work was *Who Let the Dogs Out?*, a spin off production

[185] David Stubbs, 'Olivia Colman and Tom Hollander on Rev - the Sitcom That Has Them Rolling in the Pews', *Guardian*, 15 March 2014 <http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2014/mar/15/olivia-colman-tom-hollander-rev> [accessed 4 May 2015].
[186] Hackney Council, 'Growth Boroughs', *London's Growth Boroughs* <http://www.growthboroughs.com/> [accessed 2 May 2015].
[187] Hackney Council.

for members of the newly created ACT@ATC theatre company (members of whom were under-21s from the local East London community), in which 11 company members workshopped and performed their own monologues exploring themes relating to the play *Ivan and the Dogs*. Further, *Project Ivan* (with North Wall Arts Centre) was a chance for young theatre artists from Oxford in an intensive rehearsal week during the October half term to present their own inspired by *Ivan and the Dogs*, under the direction of Jane Fallowfield and writer Tom Wells.

Sheibani's perception of community during his tenure with ATC was optimistic, positive and based on creating safe spaces where people could listen, interact and exchange experiences. I have linked this to Sennett's depiction of the dialogic exchange, Bauman's connection between safety and community, and Dolan's utopian theatre, and I am going to suggest that when Sheibani resigned the artistic directorship of ATC, a shift took place in the notion of community underpinning the company's practice: a shift from community as a positive, 'warmly persuasive' concept, to borrow from Raymond Williams once more, to community as a productively difficult and discursive place, a site for theatrical interrogation.

Ramin Gray: Artistic Director of ATC 2010 – 2017

Ramin Gray's appointment to ATC in 2010 saw a change in the kinds of theatre ATC produced. Gray has a long background in theatre, having started his career on the Regional Theatre Young Director Scheme at the Liverpool Playhouse in 1990.[188] For a decade he worked nationally and internationally as a freelance director, until in 2000 he was appointed International Associate, rising to Associate Director, at the Royal Court, where he stayed until he joined ATC in 2010. At the Royal Court he embraced new writing, directing over fifteen world premiers, including *Push Up* by Roland Schimmelpfennig (2002), *Terrorism* by the Presnyakov Brothers (2003), Simon Stephens'

[188] 'Ramin Gray', *The Agency* <http://theagency.co.uk/the-clients/ramin-gray/> [accessed 30 November 2016].

Motortown (2006), Max Frisch's *The Arsonists* (2007), two plays by Marius von Mayenburg – *The Ugly One* (2007) and *The Stone* (2009), and *Over There* by Mark Ravenhill (2009) which transferred to the Schaubűhne am Lehniner Platz in Berlin.[189] He also undertook freelance work, including *The American Pilot* by David Greig for the RSC (2005), and the German language premiere of Simon Stephens' *Harper Regan* at the Salzburg Festival in a co-production with the Schauspielhaus Hamburg (2008).[190]

As mentioned above, Sheibani and Gray have strikingly similar backgrounds (particularly in their ethnicity, education and interest in non-naturalistic theatre). However, Gray joined the company after he had already had a long career as a director for the Royal Court, in contrast to Sheibani, who was at the beginning of his career when he joined ATC. Gray brought a confidence and clarity of purpose which he had developed over his career, along with his large number of contacts from European theatre and experience of directing a wide variety of repertory. As Bentley and O'Neill left the company, Nick Williams joined as executive director, and Goldsmiths graduate Charelle Griffith as administrator.

Given Gray's background in international theatre, and the post-crash economic climate which meant funding for the arts was more difficult to come by, the company embarked on a new financial structure of international collaboration and production. Gray continued Sheibani's international touring programme, developing with Nick Williams a number of co-productions which enabled tours across the world. *The Golden Dragon*, Gray's first production, toured to India and Iraq in 2012 after a national tour across the UK. Gray directed several versions of *The Events* in different languages. Originally a co-production of Actors Touring Company, Brageteatret (Drammen), Schauspielhaus (Vienna) and the Young Vic Theatre, Gray directed a version in English for the UK in 2013, in German for Vienna in 2014 (*Die Ereignisse*) and in Norwegian for Drammen also in 2014 (*Hendelsen*). All three versions came together for a performance at the Southbank Centre (Spring

[189] 'Ramin Gray'.
[190] 'Ramin Gray'.

2014), which used different languages in different parts of the performance. Gray also directed a French version in collaboration with the Centre Dramatique National Nancy Lorraine, La Manufacture and Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg, called *Les Événements* (2017).

The aesthetics of Gray's productions had similarities to Sheibani's theatre. Working in a minimalist vein, the set designs he worked with were non-naturalistic and simple, and he encouraged metatheatricality, with his actors often acknowledging the audience within the theatre space. His directorial methods were also comparable to Sheibani's: both created productions for ATC by developing work with the actors rather than starting with pre-defined ideas of blocking or characterisation.

However, whilst Sheibani used Brook's idea of 'Holy theatre' to describe the intense, positive sense of community he created, as seen in the familial bonds he created both on and off stage, Gray could be described as producing an unholy theatre, or theatre of the profane. He delighted in the aesthetics of unease and antagonism in his work as both artistic director and in the management of the company.

During the first few weeks of Gray's work with ATC, he discussed cancelling the *Ivan and the Dogs* tour as he felt it did not fit in with his own directorial interests. This caused much internal company discussion, with Bentley in particular disagreeing with this move and arguing that cancelling the tour would alienate the hard-won collaborators and co-producers involved. Bentley was ultimately able to finish the tour, but this first disagreement serves as a key example of Gray's confidence and irreverence, and his openness to disagreement. Disagreement, I will argue throughout this thesis, works productively in Gray's theatre to show the complexities of relationality. This was a working style as well as a thematic obsession for Gray: his directorship was bold and encouraged debate. Gray brought antagonism, albeit always in a professional and respectful manner, to his working life and artistic production, recalling the aforementioned antagonistic

democracy envisioned by Mouffe.[191] Gray's working relationships with other members of the team reflected this. Williams and Griffith, too, had strong, confrontational personalities who enjoyed debate and discussion. Their work was respectful, dominant and professional, and they all rejected any sentimentality in their working methods.

Ramin Gray: ATC the Company

Just after Gray joined the company, Arts Council England (hereafter ACE) announced that due to the governmental cuts associated with the financial crisis (including £6 billion public service cuts), all regularly-funded organisations, of which ATC was one, would need to reapply for their regularly funded status.[192] In January 2011 ATC submitted their new application to ACE, a document that detailed the future aspirations of the company and which I helped to compile and edit.[193] The company's mission statement echoed the three aspects of its work that had been introduced under Sheibani's directorship: touring, internationalism and participation/education. ATC's commitment to its participation schemes was clearly worded:

> We've created opportunities for many emerging artists and engagement for new audiences. Through our highly successful SPIN OFF and ACT@ATC programmes, we will continue to engage with young and hard to reach audiences with work that is about making global theatre with local communities.[194]

[191] Mouffe, *Agonistics*.
[192] Tomlin, p. 45.
[193] Actors Touring Company, 'ATC 2011 Portfolio Application', 2011, ATC Office Digital Files.
[194] Actors Touring Company, 'ATC 2011 Portfolio Application'.

The word community was still at the forefront of the company's aims, with the engagement of 'young and hard to reach audiences' posited as part of ATC's core work. ACE approved ATC's application, and the company was awarded funding as one of the 696 'National Portfolio Organisations', the new ACE title for regularly funded organisations.[195]

However, by March 2011 it was decided that the company would wind down its participation and education strand, move out from its Hackney residence in the Tab Centre just before the Olympics and take up residence in the Institute of Contemporary Art (hereafter ICA). The move gave a strong message about the company's future and marked a clear break with its past. By leaving Hackney just before the Olympics, the company was leaving an area bright with government subsidy for community projects and urban renewal. Nick Williams, in an interview during the time, stated that 'there is a sense that the government is over-focussing on the Olympic boroughs at this time. ATC could more usefully take its work elsewhere'.[196] The new location at the ICA could not have been more different to the Tab centre. The ICA is a centre for the development and exhibition of experimental and avant-garde arts practices and is located along the Mall in sight of Buckingham Palace, part of the Crown Estate and close to the most expensive property in England. It is just on the boarder of Green Park and Mayfair, an area which boasts some of the most expensive shops, hotels and restaurants in the country. The Mall is mostly frequented by tourists rather than having a resident population like that of Hackney: the majority of people working or visiting leave the area in the evening. There is no obvious local group for ATC to collaborate with in a position similar to those they were working with in Hackney; despite the ICA's radical cultural credentials, its new location was surrounded by heritage culture and famous tourist landmarks; indeed, one of the first tweets from ATC in its new office showed an image of Big Ben peeking through its back window.

The move to the ICA was a daring one considering the much-publicised financial difficulties in which the that organization had recently found itself. In 2011, the ICA suffered a 42% cut in

[195] Arts Council England, 'National Portfolio Organisation Map', 2015 <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/our-investment/national-portfolio-organisations-map/> [accessed 4 May 2015].
[196] Interview with Producer Nick Williams at the ATC Office, 2012.

funding (but was admitted to the ACE portfolio), having received an emergency Arts Council bailout of £1.2m the previous year.[197] According to *The Guardian*, infighting and arguments about leadership and management amongst the top levels of staff were partly responsible for the resignation of its director Ekow Eshun.[198] Although not directly affiliating its work with the ICA, ATC's move to its premises was a fearless move and a clear vote of support for the ICA and its contemporary arts practices. ATC took up residence late in 2011, and at the time of writing continues to manage the company from these premises, sharing a small kitchen with another theatre institution that leases an office there, the London International Festival of Theatre. During 2011, Gray began to develop his first production for ATC, *The Golden Dragon* by Roland Schimmelfennig.

In moving to a central London office firmly ensconced in both the avant-garde arts 'establishment' and a heritage location, and by cancelling ATC's participation programme, the company could be seen to be embedding themselves in the neoliberal present, promoting 'high art' for a specialist audience at the tax payer's expense in the time of austerity. However, as ethnographer with the company I developed a more nuanced understanding of this move. The difficult financial environment of the theatre industry post-crash cannot be over-emphasised. Ramin Gray took office as Artistic Director just as austerity measures were first introduced by the coalition government. A move to focus on the primary aim of the company – to make and tour work – was astute given the economic climate, and would enable ATC to keep producing until a later time, when more funding might have become available for participatory work. Producer Nick Williams explained that the kinds of participants involved in ATC's socially engaged work were not necessarily the ones which the company's East London move has suggested that they were trying to target.[199] Rather than reaching people struggling within the culturally segregated and impoverished areas of East

[197] Maev Kennedy, 'Arts Council Funding: The Winners and Losers', *Guardian*, 30 March 2011 <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2011/mar/30/arts-council-funding-winners-losers> [accessed 4 May 2015].
[198] Aida Edemariam, 'Ekow Eshun and Alan Yentob to Quit after ICA Survives Crisis', *Guardian*, 27 August 2010 <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2010/aug/27/ica-eshun-ekow-yentob-quit> [accessed 5 May 2015].
[199] Christine Twite, Interview with Producer Nick Williams, 4 March 2012, ATC Office.

London, he suggested that the projects had attracted confident, middle class residents who were already engaged with other amateur theatre companies in London.

This ambivalence about the purpose of socially engaged work at ATC can be seen in the company's 2011 ACE National Portfolio application to win continued core funding, where the policy of participation was in part conflated with building new audiences for ATC's main productions. The policy suggests that participatory work was produced to 'engage new audiences' rather than primarily to promote social change, and that the work to engage ATC's local communities was based on economic necessity rather than social vision.[200] This suggests that ATC believed there was an imperative (actual or imagined) to build audiences for their productions, or at least they were unable to find the terminology to describe the social impact of their projects. Whilst I am not suggesting that ATC's socially engaged work was indeed created solely for the purpose of audience building, it is interesting that this rhetoric was employed for the 2011 ACE National Portfolio application. It suggests, under Gray's new artistic directorship, ATC had an ambivalent attitude towards what might be called their 'socially engaged' work and an uncertainty as to its purpose: it was not felt that the programme could be omitted from the application, but neither could its aims be fully articulated. As we have seen, this programme would by ultimately cut within the first year of Gray's tenure.

Finally, and most importantly, as I observed the new staff put together their first production, it became clear that Gray did not reject the idea of socially engaged work outright, but wanted to deliver its principles through his core artistic practice, rather than through a separate, outreach-style programme. I suggest that Gray instinctively understood the importance of socially engaged practice within the theatre he was creating but was exploring it in a different way to Sheibani. Gray had experienced working in socially engaged theatre before. In a 2017 interview he stated that his background doing work for the Royal Opera House education department, in schemes such as 'Write an Opera', had been important.[201] Whilst in one sense, the work of an opera house could not be more elitist, it was the ROH's schools programme which enabled Gray to work with school children

[200] Actors Touring Company, 'ATC 2011 Portfolio Application'.
[201] Interview with Ramin Gray at ATC Office, 2017.

at St Clement Dane's Primary School in 1999 to write their own new opera (then presented at the opening of the Royal Opera House's new studio space, the Linbury theatre).[202] Here Gray first met John Browne, with whom he was later to collaborate on his ATC productions of *The Events* and *The Suppliant Women*, working with local communities who would end up being integral parts of the productions.

Gray has developed an eclectic portfolio of work during his artistic directorship of ATC. His inaugural production was of Roland Schimmelpfennig's *The Golden Dragon* (2011), a contemporary German play which toured around the UK before undertaking a tour in India and a brief run in Iraq. He followed this with a double bill of *Crave* by Sarah Kane and *Illusions* by Ivan Viripaev (2012), a contemporary Russian writer. He then commissioned David Greig to write *The Events* (first performed 2013). These are the four plays which I will be focussing on in this thesis. Gray-directed, ATC-produced work, such as *Martyr* (2015) by German writer Marius Von Meyenburg, *The Suppliant Women* (first performed 2016) in new translation by David Greig and *Winter Solstice* (first performed 2017), again by Roland Schimmelpfennig, were produced after this period of research.

In an interview for Start the Week on BBC Radio 4, Ramin Gray likened theatre to a town-hall meeting where 'even if the quality of theatre you are seeing is really, really bad, there is something harmless and possibly even good for us to come together, to dwell, to meditate, to consider things of great import to us all'.[203] As I will describe in the following chapters, Gray's theatre, and the process of its creation, fosters an inclusive sense of debate: everyone is welcome to be part of the dialogue.

Gray's Dialogic Rehearsal Room

[202] Serena Allott, 'From the School Room to the Stage', *Telegraph*, 23 November 1999 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4719115/From-the-school-room-to-the-stage.html> [accessed 9 April 2018].
[203] 'Ramin Gray on The Events', *Start the Week* (BBC Radio 4, 2014) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0457rml> [accessed 17 June 2014].

From his first production with ATC, Gray insisted on opening up the rehearsal space of his productions for members of the public to watch and respond. The notion of the rehearsal room as a 'safe space' for the actors and artistic team to develop ideas without onlookers was turned on its head. Each day different people, sometimes members of the public who had tweeted ATC, sometimes other theatre professionals known to a member of the creative team, would sit in rehearsals to watch, discuss and give feedback. Some of these people were then filmed giving their opinions, and the recordings were added to *The Golden Dragon* website which collated tweets, blog posts and other online comment by both ATC and their audiences. Gray said in one of the first YouTube videos about the production that the mystery guest scheme was

> [...] interesting and fun and strange for us [the actors and artistic team] because someone comes in and looks at what we're doing, and that makes us think about what we're doing, and the dialogue and relationship between us and the audience is what theatre is all about.[204]

In my experience of sitting in the rehearsals of all of the productions featured in this thesis, I was conscious of the irreverent and open manner in which Gray led the team. Gray always invited the playwright or translator into the rehearsal room, or to be on the end of the phone, when discussing particularly pertinent issues of meaning or action. He consistently provoked discussion or debate around the topics the plays raised, and rather than creating a protected environment, part of his creative process involved encouraging (professional and carefully constructed) friction and disagreement between the people in the room. The friction was often dissipated by Gray's use of play: during *The Golden Dragon* and *Crave* large numbers of costumes and props were left in the rehearsal room and the actors were encouraged to use them in their performance experiments.

[204] Actors Touring Company, 'The Rehearsal Videos about The Golden Dragon', 2011 <https://thegoldendragonatc.wordpress.com/media/multimedia-and-slide-show/> [accessed 5 October 2016].

Some were obviously related to the theme of the piece, others seemed bizarre and random (a small plastic figurine of wrestler 'The Rock' remains in my memory as one of the strangest props in the *Crave* rehearsal room). This dialogic route to the construction of performance did not end in the rehearsal room: Gray encouraged his actors to continue to experiment and try new ideas out during the runs themselves, meaning that the actors were free to respond to the different audiences and spaces to which each production toured.

In Peter Boenisch's recent monograph *Directing Scenes and Senses*, he usefully articulates the common practice of theatre criticism which constructs 'blinding and intellectually stifling perspective[s] that define directing [...] solely in terms of the one "proper" and ultimate authority that brings to life and controls all aspects of the production'. English theatre is usually described as 'director's theatre' which focuses on bringing the text alive, whereas European '*Regietheater* (literally, direct*ing* theatre)' is conceived of as a practice which engages radically with the dramatic text to subvert, change or even eradicate its importance in theatre-making.[205] I quote the following at length, as Boenish's work describes this binary in terms reminiscent of the paradoxical concept of community explored by Nancy:

> Conceiving of directing as the individual creative product delivered by a director as author-*auteur* inevitably stages a clash and competition between writer and director. It positions the director of "director's theatre" *opposite* and in opposition to the text, suggesting an insurmountable antagonistic tension between writer and director [...] reiterating implications of [...] master and servant. From this perspective, only two positions can be taken: either, directors are seen as dictators suppressing and crushing playwrights' "democratic" voice, or conversely, they become ultimate liberators, the freedom fighters who deconstruct the despotic hierarchy and "authority" of the Text [...] the very notion of

[205] Peter Boenisch, *Directing Scenes and Senses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 7.

> "playwrights" theatre only makes sense if it is based on the assumption of "authorial competition" rather than collaborative co-creation.[206]

Interestingly, Boenisch characterises this binary in political terms, defining the directors as either 'dictators' violently enforcing a unity of vision onto the creative act (no dissent is allowed) or 'freedom fighters' who similarly violently overthrow authority in a libertarian act to permit dissent and liberty. This dichotomy recalls Nancy's view of romanticised community and the tension he posits between the freedom of the individual and the cohesion and unity expected from the group.[207]

Boenisch's book aims to redefine *Regietheater* in different terms, which I find useful to articulate the principles behind Gray's practice, and which can be tied to Mouffe's and Sennett's interest in dialogue and antagonism as constructive and productive in the creation of community. Boenisch sees *Regietheater*, and in particular the role of the director, as the mediator between text, audience and staging rather than the director as a figure who either support or subverts the playtext. He writes that

> *Regie* supplies us, as actors and spectators, with an attitude of playfulness that fosters thinking and imagining, by activating and exploiting the theatral dynamics of meaning, motion and affective perception [...] *Regie* opens us a living space of thinking, and of thinking differently, a vital room for possibilities, a vibrant place for dissensus [...] [rejecting] uniform clarity, it thrown doubt on comfortable truths and accepted givens, and thereby confronts performers, theatre-makers and the spectating public alike with difficulties, with risk and with responsibilities [...which] unsettles the rigour of fixed partitions of the sensible

[206] Boenisch, p. 7.
[207] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*.

> and opens up alternatives [...] insisting that there must be and will be different perspectives and different '*senses*'.[208]

Here Boenisch articulates many of the key areas of Gray's directing style: the celebration of dissensus, but alongside this, a playfulness which defuses unproductive tension and actively encourages the idea that tensions, in any case, are often impossible to resolve and can be used productively in rehearsal and performance.

Gray's open rehearsal practice actively encourages what Boenisch calls 'a human community, bound not by the circle of production and consumption, but by common playing and thinking'.[209]

Digital and Social Media Strategy

The 'call out' for people to attend the rehearsals was given on social media, whilst Twitter and Facebook posts were encouraged to discuss ATC through these media, another way in which Gray's artistic directorship has encouraged a sense of dialogue with and amongst ATC's audiences. The London premiere of *The Golden Dragon*, Gray's inaugural production, saw ATC create the first ever English 'bloggers call'. Bloggers were given tickets to the press night and encouraged to write about what they saw. Community, for Gray, is everyone who comes into contact with ATC's work, be it during rehearsal or during the production run. ATC fostered a genuine sense of openness to dialogue (and even criticism, as inevitably and importantly dialogue does not solely rely on positive, unified opinion). The actors themselves were encouraged to Tweet and blog about their

[208] Boenisch, pp. 191–92.
[209] Boenisch, p. 193.

experiences, and indeed, once Gray left a production on the first night, he encouraged the actors to keep experimenting rather than mechanically performing what they had done before.

Branding and Marketing

Gray never articulated to ACE the change in company ethos, because his first submission for the ATC to become part of the portfolio occurred before he had developed his thinking in early 2011, and the second submission in 2015 occurred after the transition had been enacted. However, the vision of ATC, printed at the beginning of the play texts for each production, reads as a useful articulation of the change of ethos over time.

The first text produced after Ramin Gray became artistic director of ATC was *The Golden Dragon* in 2011. The vision had been completely rewritten from Sheibani's of the previous year, and bears very little resemblance to it. It invokes the long history of the company 'from 1980' which previous iterations of the vision had not, and states as a priority that ATC was minimising its 'carbon footprint' and, directly referencing ACE, saying that 'we'll leverage the company's resources both artistically and financially, reducing our financial dependence in ACE'.[210] Echoing ACE's core concern of the period – in the wake of austerity post-financial crash – the tone here reads as a business strategy to impress funders rather than a declaration of artistic intent. This text was written at a time when Gray way still developing his ideas for the company, and this statement of vision reflects a necessary generalisation because of it. To the right of the vision there is a page dedicated to the Spin Off and participation work of ATC, as long as the vision of the company itself, again echoing the sentiments of the Gray's first ACE application, which seemed to support the programme.

However, in the articulation of Spin Off, the words 'outreach' or 'participation' are not used. Instead, Spin Off is described as being a forum for 'discussion around the themes and issues' which

[210] Schimmelpfennig, *The Golden Dragon*.

the work raises.[211] Spin Off has been subtly re-theorised; its purpose is no longer to engage with the people 'who might not otherwise have the opportunity to experience theatre' as in the front matter of the *Eurydice* text, but is rather to focus on making the company's work more engaging to as wide an audience as possible.[212] The aforementioned theatre group ATC@ATC (a group run by ATC of under 26s in the Hackney and Tower Hamlets area interested in theatre), initially part of the SPIN OFF programme, is now co-opted into the artistic work of the company more fully; it is described as a space for 'nurturing and supporting young talent to make theatre' rather than as having any social aim.[213]

When the *Illusions* text was published in 2012, the SPIN OFF and ACT@ATC work had been discontinued, and where the participation work blurb had been, there was now a call for donors. This reflects producer Williams' carefully planned, proactive fund raising, aimed at shoring up the company's finances in times of austerity. The vision of the company had also changed: the work of the company was now called 'international contemporary theatre', and the relationship between the company and theatre makers overseas posited as integral to the company's work; ATC is now said to '[commission] its own translations' and follow a 'national and international touring programme'.[214] Gray's passion for international theatre work has at this point filtered down into the company vision.

In the 2013 text of *The Events*, the company had been completely rebranded. A new logo reflected the new company's irreverent and confident image: the initials ATC had been exploded out on to the page, creating an asymmetrical effect, defiantly post-modern and irregular. Sheibani's simple, minimalist logo was blow apart by Gray's new design. Even the letters of the company no longer sat together: relations are never fixed and unchangeable in Gray's work.

[211] Schimmelpfennig, *The Golden Dragon*.
[212] Ruhl; Schimmelpfennig, *The Golden Dragon*.
[213] Schimmelpfennig, *The Golden Dragon*.
[214] Viripaev.

Figure 3a. ATC logo during Sheibani's tenure

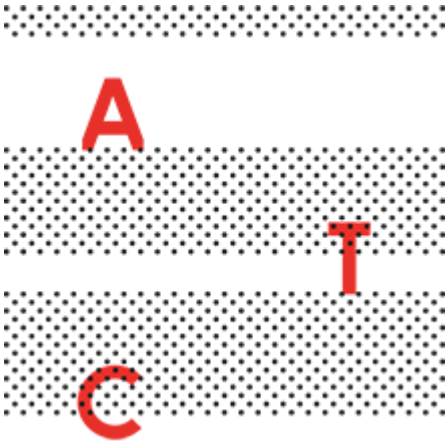

Figure 3b. The new 2012 logo for ATC

Along with the new logo, the new vision now ran as follows:

> In an increasingly globalised age, where society and identity is in constant flux, the need for art that rediscovers our sense of self and our relations with others is at its strongest. ATC

> fulfils this need by touring international contemporary theatre. Our mission is to take daring and curious new work further and further afield, and we want you to go with us there.[215]

This vision recognises the argument of much of Gray's work: that within contemporary communities there is a constant shift of relationality between people.

Conclusion

The way ATC negotiated relationships *with* the wider theatre community and their audiences changed rapidly during the period from 2010 to 2015, as increasingly sophisticated and inexpensive technologies enabled new ways to open up its work to others. My research occurred during a time when theatre practitioners and companies were increasingly able to be in dialogue with other industry professionals and audiences, through social media. A culture of 'openness' has been developing in the theatre industry, both in performance aesthetics and company policies. Information about the working processes and rehearsals of companies has never been more accessible, leading to a better interaction of knowledge and practice within the industry and the general population. YouTube channels for theatre companies have now become a publicity prerequisite, and the falling cost of high-quality cameras along with increasingly sophisticated editing programmes have allowed theatre companies to capture parts of their work usually unseen. In particular, chatter between companies on social media networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook, as well as the conversations between audience members and companies, has changed the way theatre companies talk to their audiences, and added another layer to this research.

[215] Greig, *The Events*.

In his championship of open rehearsals, in his encouragement of audience and actors' blogging and tweeting, in his choice of plays and in his creation of dramaturgical structures and strategies, Gray has developed a sophisticated and complex understanding of the word 'community' through his work at ATC. This thesis argues that the work of ATC under Gray can be productively read alongside theoretical interrogations of the idea of community, challenging previous overarching positive assumptions about a once 'warmly persuasive' term.

Chapter Three: *The Golden Dragon* by Roland Schimmelpfennig

Introduction

In this first case-study chapter on ATC's production of *The Golden Dragon*, I begin by describing the play, which centres on a group of migrants working at an Asian restaurant, and use Zygmunt Bauman's concept of the alienated post-modern subject as a frame of reference. I describe the fact that during the 2000s there was a growth in the number of theatre productions addressing the issue of migration, in response to the increase in migration to Britain during this period and the associated debates in the public sphere I discussed in Chapter One. I suggest that *The Golden Dragon* has a formal inventiveness which is different to other plays addressing the issue of migration during this period. In particular, the use of actors to play characters of strikingly different races, ages and characters of another sex to their own emphasises the differences between the actors and the characters they play: it draws attention to the difficulties of fully understanding the Other, and is a reflection of the audience's assumed drive to understand what is going on on stage. I consider some of the arguments this production gave rise to about the ethical implications of representing migration. I argue that the dramaturgical structures of *The Golden Dragon* both remind the audience of the need to observe carefully and try to engage with the Other portrayed on stage, whilst at the same time the production foregrounds the individual's inability ever to fully understand another person. Key to the analysis of this production is the concept of dialogical encounter in ATC's work, drawn from Richard Sennett's *Together.* I suggest that *The Golden Dragon* in performance seeks to emphasise the difficulties of understanding the Other but also stresses the importance of maintaining a dialogue. At the end of the chapter, I return to Mouffe's notion of antagonistic democracy to account for the complex debates about race and racism in casting that arose from this production.

***The Golden Dragon*: A Synopsis**

ATC's *The Golden Dragon* set was simple: a bare stage, behind which three huge rolls of white paper were winched up to hang behind the set. Where an auditorium for this touring production allowed it, the audience were seated around three sides of the stage. Along the front of the stage were a variety of props, which in some venues audience members had to step carefully around to find their seats. Each of the props was a laid out on the edge of the stage: a large wok and ladle, a pint glass of water, a walking stick and thick-brimmed glasses, a tea towel, a flat cap, a toy clock, and a pile of clothing next to a small suitcase. As the actors performed they used only the props and costumes littered on the floor to represent their characters. The auditorium and audience shared the same lighting state for the entirety of the performance, blurring the boundary between the stage and seating. The play began as the five actors, dressed in simple casual clothing, walked towards the stage chatting to each other, some stretching their arms to warm up. One actor usually appeared to be texting on his mobile phone, which he eventually put to one side. In many performances I witnessed, the audience did not at first realise that the play was beginning, as the actors were easily misinterpreted as late-arriving spectators rather than performers. There were two young men actors, one young woman and two older actors – one male, one female. All were Caucasian, and as the programme notes explained, all were from the British Isles (with the two younger men being Scottish and Irish respectively in the first run of the production). The lighting design and actors' entrances were consciously constructed to suggest that the actors might easily have been members of the audience.

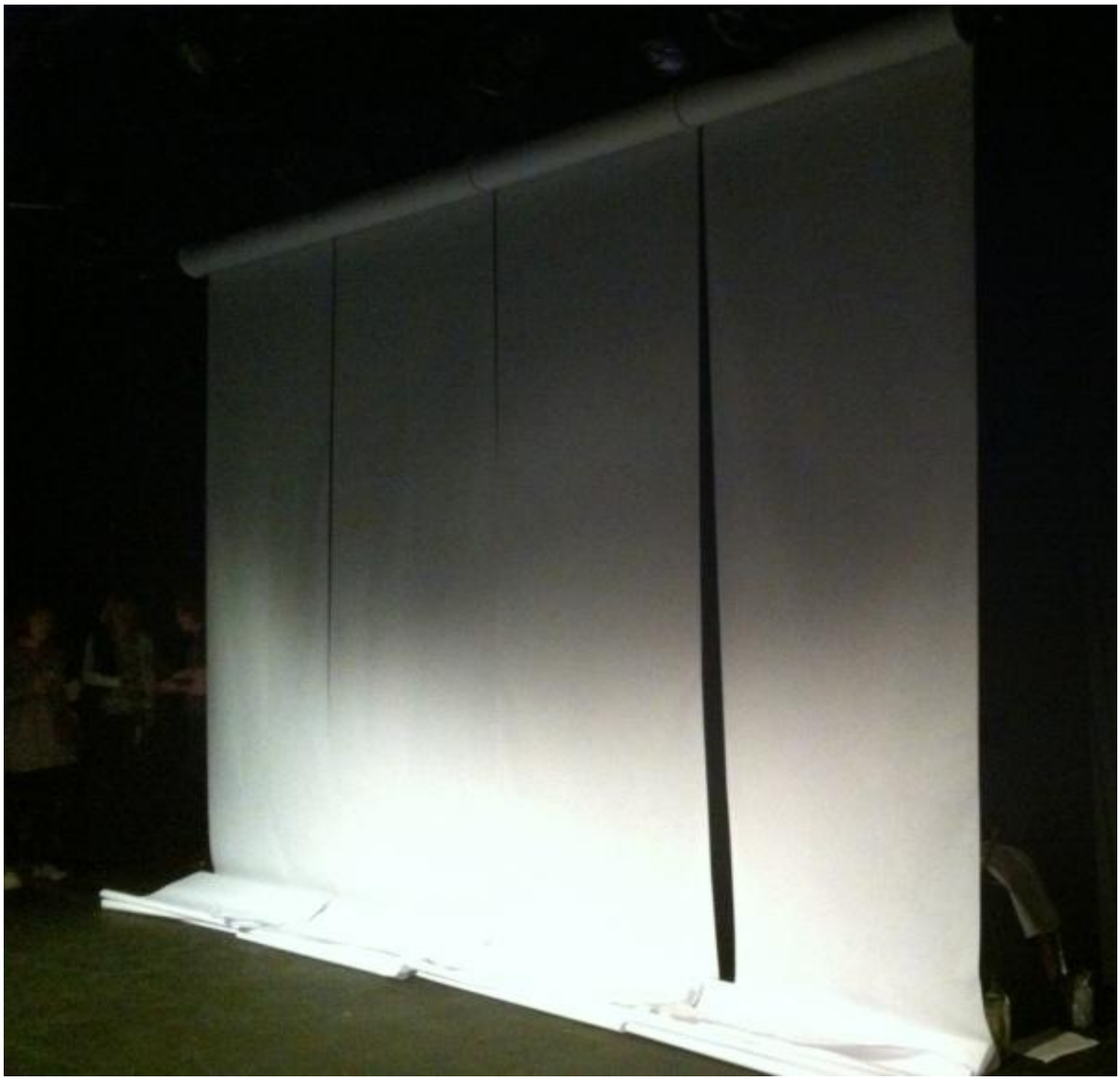

Figure 4. The Set, *The Golden Dragon*, Traverse (dir. Ramin Gray, 2011), Photo by Christine Twite.

The five 'characters' of the play are A YOUNG MAN, A WOMAN OVER SIXTY, A YOUNG WOMAN, A MAN OVER SIXTY and simply A MAN. The actors cast in these roles conformed to the age and sex suggested by this dramatis personae. However, the dialogue itself is written so that each of these actors play different characters living in and around The Golden Dragon restaurant at different points of the play. All the actors play against type: THE WOMAN OVER SIXTY plays the young pregnant girl in the narrative, THE MAN OVER SIXTY plays the young air hostess, THE YOUNG

MAN plays the aged grandfather and the young woman plays the young Asian cook. The dialogue is fast paced and consists of short scenes, in which the actors sometimes narrate their actions in the third person before they step into character and present them in the first person. Often, stage directions are stated out loud by the actors, most notably the direction 'short pause' which is repeated several times through the production. Several times the actors list a dish on the golden dragon menu, stating its number, its name and the complete list of ingredients in it – often in no apparent relation to the rest of the dialogue.

The Golden Dragon follows the lives of several groups of people living in the same building, over The Golden Dragon restaurant; these people exist geographically close together but their main interactions with each other are based on monetary exchange for goods and services rather than emotional engagement. The restaurant is a locus for this emotional alienation; it is the hub where all the character visit to eat but not to interact. The familial relationships that do exist between the characters are often difficult. A group of Asian cooks try to help one of the kitchen hands with his toothache, and because he is an illegal immigrant they are forced to remove the tooth with vodka and a spanner themselves rather than seek medical help. A young couple upstairs find out they have conceived a child, to the father's violent consternation and panic. The new mother's grandfather also lives in the building, bemoaning old age and the loss of youth, using a prostitute to revisit his youth. A married couple live in one of the flats, the wife admitting infidelity whilst her devastated husband gets drunk with his friend who owns the shop next door. Two air hostesses are eating in The Golden Dragon at the play's opening, they also share a flat in the building and are having a quiet meal after a long flight: their conversation is vacuous and focuses on one of the hostess's relationship with a pilot, the so-called 'Barbie-fucker'.

Alongside these stories, the fable of the cricket and the ant is narrated and performed, which at first plays out like Aesop's traditional tale: the cricket sings all Summer whereas the ant works hard and stores food, and come Winter the ant refuses to share food with the cricket because

of her idleness: he lets her starve. It becomes apparent that the cricket stands for a young Chinese girl, sister of the boy with toothache, who has been forced into sex-slavery by the shop-owner (the cricket of the fable) next door. Each of the white men in the narrative – the new father, the cuckolded husband and the old man – end up using the prostitute viciously, resulting in her apparent death. This occurs whilst her brother, who is revealed to be the boy in the kitchen, is slowly bleeding to death as a result of the tooth-removal. In a moment of magic realism, the hole in his tooth opens to reveal his worried family in China, desperately trying to communicate with him and find out what has happened to his sister. The tooth flies up into the air and lands in a bowl of soup, a bowl destined to be the dinner of one of the air hostesses. The boy dies, and in order to get rid of the body, the restaurant staff roll up his corpse in a wall hanging representing a golden dragon and throw his body into the river. The journey of the corpse back to China is poetically imagined, and the boy's arrival home is then described, years later, now only a skeleton stripped of all flesh. Meanwhile, the air hostesses have since left the restaurant, one horrified by the tooth in the soup, the other strangely fascinated by it. This air hostess wraps the tooth in a napkin, and eventually walks to the bridge over the river where the restaurant workers have just thrown the boy's body. She puts the tooth in her mouth, tastes it, then spits it into the river. The play ends.

These characters form a seemingly broken community, or a lack of community; each is alienated from each other despite their stories being interconnected in compelling familial, emotional and violent ways. The violent death of the illegal immigrant at the heart of the play is unnoticed by and hidden from the other characters. The Chinese boy's family desperately try to contact him in the magic realist sequence, but they cannot get through. The Chinese boy is also urgently seeking his sister, but to no avail, although the audience knows she is within reach. The illegal migrants are pushed into silence about the reality of their lives, as the Western residents similarly are alienated from migrants' stories and their own friends and families. Real emotional exchanges between characters in the play are few; exchanges are usually monetary or exploitatively sexual. The fact that the audience can see these figures' connectivity whilst the characters cannot is

a dramatic irony that creates a tragic feel to the piece. Only in the final moment of the play is a desire for a positive intersubjectivity displayed by a central character. This moment is hauntingly captured in when the air hostess tastes the Chinese boy's tooth in her mouth. She puts the tooth within her own body, in a sensuous act which presumably allows her to taste the boy's blood. In Gray's production the air hostess then spits the tooth out into the audience, in a final gesture which is both unnerving, and shares the positive potential in this action with the spectators.

The action of the play could take place in any Western country where illegal immigrants are seen as an issue, as there are no specific signifiers of exact location. This lack of geographical specificity is mirrored in the play's portrayal of Easternness: the restaurant itself is labelled Thai, Chinese and Vietnamese at different moments, and often as an amalgam of all three, treating the specific Asian cultures as indistinguishable, or their differences as unimportant. In the text both Easternness and Westernness are depicted in a generalised fashion. The German-penned play therefore sits well in its English translation, as it emphasises the similar features of globalised Western cosmopolitan life rather than reading as specific to a contemporary German setting. Birgit Schreyer Duarte notes in her essay on a Canadian version of *The Golden Dragon* that the play's translation to a Canadian setting was equally plausible.[216]

Theorising *The Golden Dragon*

The world displayed in *The Golden Dragon* is analogous to Zygmunt Bauman's description of globalised alienation described in his work on community. He describes the contemporary seperation of economoic and political powers within states, globalisation and late capitalism, and imagines the post-modern subject who lives within it. He presents an enviroment in which collective

[216] Birgit Schreyer Duarte, 'The Pleasure of Being In On It: Foreign Perspectives and "In-Authenticity" in The Golden Dragon at the Tarragon Theatre', *Canadian Theatre Review*, 153.1 (2013), 102–4.

action is made unworkable, so that the post-modern subject is diminished of responsibility for the larger community. In this world, '[s]hedding responsibility for consequences is the most coveted and cherished gain that the new mobility brings to free-floating, localy-unbound capitalism'.[217] The play is particularly bleak because most of the characters of *The Golden Dragon* appear not to feel the need to build community, even one based on an unworkable romantic conception. As I have recounted in Chapter One, Bauman suggests the desire for commonality is symptomatic of the post-modern age, but in *The Golden Dragon* there is an absence of even a idealistic desire for community.[218]

The alienation of the characters of *The Golden Dragon* can be productively read in the light of Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*.[219] Debord's writing, although from the 1960s, works well to describe the alienation of the late-capitalist world of this play. Debord reads the inhabitants of capitalist countries as spectators who live in a 'vicious cycle of isolation' which creates 'lonely crowds'.[220] Of the spectacle he explains that

> [t]he spectacle is not a collection of images, rather, it is a social relationship between people that are moderated by images.[221]

In this equation, the spectator has been anesthetised so that in seeing the Other they can only see the images that have been produced and sanctioned by the capitalist system. Isolation within a group is produced because the spectator is prevented from creating a meaningful exchange with anyone else, but is simultaneously unaware of the reality of their position. As Deboard's spectacle

[217] Zygmunt Bauman, 'The World Inhospitable to Levinas', *Philosophy Today*, 43.2 (1999), 151–167 (p. 159).
[218] Bauman, *Community*.
[219] Debord.
[220] Debord, p. 32.
[221] Debord, p. 24.

generalises and homogenises, Schimmelpfennig's play and Gray's production serve to encourage a self-consciousness in the spectator of their own capacities for similar generalisations, particularly when imagining the Other and to suggest they look beyond such spectacles to the complex realities of identity and community.

Lévinas's concept of the obscured face also offers a helpful way in to an analysis of *The Golden Dragon*. The play reminds of the spectator of the difficulty of ever knowing the Other. However, it also stresses the importance of looking past a facade of social generalisations and seeming homogeneity, and suggests that one might at least reaches for an understanding of the difficulty of knowing or seeing the other. Further, Grey's production for ATC, foregrounds ideas of looking and seeing which recall Lévinas's emphasis on encounter and recognition.

Roland Schimmelpfennig: A Brief History

Roland Schimmelpfennig, the writer of *The Golden Dragon*, has a history of writing plays which focus on late capitalism's alienating effects, and the West's fractious relationship with the East. His work has only recently come to prominence in the UK, and it is therefore useful to briefly summarise his work here. German-born, Schimmelpfennig worked as a journalist in Istanbul before stints as director and dramaturg in Germany, then began work as a freelance writer in 1996. The first UK production of his work was *Push Up*, also directed by Ramin Gray, which was produced at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in February 2002.[222] The production and play explored the dehumanising effect of capitalism on six employees in an unnamed multinational company.[223] The characters in this play scrabble for position and promotion at the expense of possible friendships and love affairs. Two security guards, whose monologues bookend the play, are the only characters

[222] Roland Schimmelpfennig, *Push Up*, trans. by Maje Zade (London: Nick Hern Books, 2002).
[223] The Royal Court, 'Archived: Push Up at The Royal Court Theatre', *The Royal Court* <http://www.royalcourttheatre.com/whats-on/international-playwrights-push-up> [accessed 16 May 2016].

far enough removed from this process to 'see' what is going on. Like the audience, they watch the lives of the employees (albeit in this case on several different security cameras), and are therefore able to contextualise the process of dehumanisation occurring. This ability to witness and contextualise is seen as ethically positive, and able to overcome the alienating effects of the capitalist present.

Shortly afterwards, ATC commissioned David Tushingham to translate another of Schimmelpfennig's works, *Arabian Night*, in April 2002, during the artistic directorship of Gordon Anderson.[224] This play mirrors *The Golden Dragon* in that it follows the lives of five people living in and around a tower block one evening, and like *The Golden Dragon*, is set in the contemporary, late-capitalist Western world. It too portrays alienated characters speaking to the audience rather than ever interacting with each other.[225] The tower block and the identical flats of this play are emblematic of the mundane and monotonous nature of the residents' middle-class lives. The tower block is at times is a prison, literally trapping some of the residents, who are unable to break free of their alienated existence. Their mundane lives gradually get twisted into a beautiful and potentially transcendent magic realist re-enactment of an Arabian Nights-themed story. During this time, Schimmelpfennig's reputation began to grow in the UK, and his plays have been steadily produced every year up to the present. His UK success is perhaps consolidated by the recent 2014 publication by Oberon Books of *Roland Schimmelpfennig: Plays One*, showcasing four of his most popular recent plays, also translated by David Tushingham.[226] The blurb for *Plays One* calls Schimmelpfennig 'the most performed German playwright' in the UK, and indeed Schimmelpfennig's success here continued with ATC's critically acclaimed production of *Winter Solstice* by Schimmelpfennig at the Orange Tree Theatre at the beginning of 2017.[227]

[224] Actors Touring Company, 'Actors Touring Company Official Website', 2014 <http://www.atctheatre.com/> [accessed 29 October 2014].
[225] Roland Schimmelpfennig, *Arabian Night*, trans. by David Tushingham (London: Oberon Books, 2002).
[226] Roland Schimmelpfennig, *Schimmelpfennig: Plays One*, trans. by David Tushingham (London: Oberon Books, 2014).
[227] Schimmelpfennig, *Schimmelpfennig: Plays One*.

The Golden Dragon is Schimmelpfennig's most formally inventive play to be performed in the UK to date, but many of his earlier works including *Push Up* and *Arabian Night* contain similar theatrical techniques to *The Golden Dragon*, just as they echo *The Golden Dragon*'s thematic focus on middle-class white Europeans and their intractable connection to globalisation and capitalism. Rather than written and performed in naturalistic style, or as a didactic political theatre, the presentation is more complex. Nicholas Ridout has suggested that

> [...] in much contemporary thinking and writing about theatre and performance, the production of ethical relationships and situations is considered preferable to the production of political effects, which are often regarded as crude propaganda on the one hand or hopelessly and naively ineffective on the other. Thus ethics displaces politics [...][228]

This is certainly true for *The Golden Dragon* and many of Schimmelpfennig's other works. The characters are presented as locked into a system which commodifies everything around them and they are themselves commodified by the systems that control them. Relationships cannot be created between people, as in *Push Up,* or they are at the mercy of the larger forces of globalisation, as in another Schimmelpfennig play, *The Animal Kingdom*. In *The Animal Kingdom* the actors play jobbing actors in a kind of dramatic tautology: the actor-characters which the actors play are part of a larger mega-musical-like production which turns the actors into mere cogs in the theatre machine, and the piece ends with an absurd literalisation of this objectification as four of the actors reluctantly come on stage to perform as a fried egg, a piece of toast, a pepper mill and a ketchup bottle.[229] Another Schimmelpfennig play, *Peggy Pickett Sees the Face of God*, stages a dinner party

[228] Ridout, *Theatre and Ethics*, p. 56.
[229] Schimmelpfennig, *Schimmelpfennig: Plays One*, pp. 78–79.

where two doctors fighting AIDS in Africa return home and visit two medical school friends who stayed in their home country. The play depicts the potential negative effects of Western interventionism in the developing world against the bleakness of repetitive and predictable middle-class life in the West. It becomes clear that the two doctors who went to Africa have both contracted the disease they were trying to cure, whilst their dinner hosts talk robotically about their daughter who may or may not be imagined. Peggy Pickett is their daughter's doll, who stands in for the child on stage as she herself apparently attends a sleepover. The doctors from abroad bring another doll, an African carved one which they name Abeni, who similarly stands in for the doctors' child patient Annie – Annie, it is revealed, has died of AIDS. The two dolls are played with on stage as objects at the mercy of the adults, just as the children themselves are in the power of their carers. As in *Push Up*, each of the characters step out of the main narrative to present a monologue to the audience about their hopes and worries, set against the more naturalistic presentation of the main narrative.

Formally, *The Golden Dragon* is more complex than anything Schimmelpfennig had written before. It was performed by (in Gray's production white middle-class) actors who were asked to perform as characters radically different from themselves - other races, other sexes, other ages. Where other Schimmelpfennig plays consider the difficulty of intersubjectivity between people thematically, in *The Golden Dragon* this difficulty was literalised on stage, as actors played radically against type. The play and its British production were not only a new experiment for this writer, but were radically different to previous migration genre plays in British theatre.

I argue that this formal accentuation of the obvious difference between actors' and characters' bodies reflects the alienation of the characters. It also reminded the audience of the limits of looking, the difficulties of understanding difference, and the limitations of a liberal humanist insistence on a shared humanity or human condition. The formal inventiveness of *The Golden*

Dragon can be read as an attempt to stage the unknowable and anonymous face, central to Lévinas's idea of a contemporary ethics based on the relationship of the individual with the Other.[230]

Ramin Gray's Inaugural Production for ATC

Ramin Gray brought the script for *The Golden Dragon* with him when he was interviewed for the position as new artistic director, and suggested it to the interview panel as a possible future production. Gray's choice of script marked a new period of artistic creativity for ATC. The play sat well within Gray's background of work with play by international writers, whilst Schimmelpfennig was a writer who had also been performed by ATC in the past and represented some continuity with the company's history. The play feels closer to the kind of contemporary European drama which artistic director Gordon Anderson was producing during his period at ATC from 2001 to 2007, than the work of Bijan Shebani whose play choices, excepting *Gone Too Far!*, favoured texts based on classic or folk-inspired narratives by American or UK writers.[231]

As I have recounted, Ramin Gray's new directorship signalled a radical change in tone for the company: the traditional boundaries between director, performer, audience and theatre management were interrogated during his tenure. Members of the public gave feedback to actors in the rehearsal, actors were writing and directing their own works which were performed as pre-show events around the main production, and online dialogues between audience members, the company and the actors and company was encouraged. The process of theatre making, from rehearsal room to the performances themselves, was being opened up. Discussion and interaction were encouraged. The troupe of East London young people, ACT@ATC, was gradually dismantled during the run of *The Golden Dragon*, with the plays themselves instead being seen as the focus of ATC's

[230] Lévinas.
[231] See Chapter Two.

work. Rehearsals for *The Golden Dragon* took place mainly in the Arcola theatre, Dalston, where the work would have its London run. I attended about once a week to watch the production progress. Parts of the rehearsals were filmed and added to the company's YouTube channel, and each day a different member of the public was invited to watch rehearsals take place.[232] Actors in the production were invited to blog, tweet and photograph the process. During *The Golden Dragon* run I was the media manager, collating and commissioning such content for a specially made microsite www.thegoldendragonatc.wordpress.com.

The play had its premiere at the Holt festival in Norfolk, and then travelled to the Traverse theatre in Edinburgh for the duration of the August Fringe Festival. The production toured throughout the UK, before touring abroad in India, Iraq and Ireland. A full list of tour dates and reviews can be found on the ATC main site and *The Golden Dragon* microsite.[233] The first ever social media call in London theatre was announced prior to the play's Arcola run, where free tickets were offered to people willing to blog about the show. I collated these videos, tweets and blogs on the microsite www.thegoldendragonatc.wordpress.com. Online debate and interaction was encouraged to a degree, however the company asked that the more negative blogs and tweets not be published on the microsite. I also created an online survey to gauge audience reaction to the production, and received 56 responses. Ramin Gray opened up the usually closed world of rehearsals and company life, allowing online and real-life opportunities to watch rehearsals and exchange opinions on the production. During the production's London run a series of pre- and post-show events were commissioned by Gray to showcase playwrights from around the world. The events included *Some Talk of You* by Nathalie Armin from UK/Iran, *Parrots* by Sophia Mertins from Guatamala (and also a graduate of the ACT@ATC theatre company), *Sister Of* by Lot Vekemans from the Netherlands, *Making the Sound of Loneliness* drawn from the work of Sam Shepard and conceived by *The Golden*

[232] Actors Touring Company, *ATC and The Golden Dragon* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvRBHaOWApI&list=PLDF3C4E5372658291> [accessed 24 October 2013].
[233] Christine Twite, 'The Golden Dragon Microsite', *The Golden Dragon* <https://thegoldendragonatc.wordpress.com/> [accessed 22 July 2015].

Dragon actor Jack Tarlton (this later toured as an ATC stand along project to the US) and finally *Screwed* by another of *The Golden Dragon* actors, Kathryn O'Reilly.

The themes of empathy, intersubjectivity and community are at the heart of *The Golden Dragon*, and it is interesting to see that this was reflected in ATC's production. Open rehearsals allowed other voices, other opinions and different pairs of eyes to watch and respond to the production. The actors were encouraged to experiment on stage long after Gray had stopped watching every performance. The actors too were encouraged to take on roles of writers and directors in the 'side order' events, as they were called. Everyone could have an opinion and be part of the dialogue about the piece and its themes. The encouragement of social media and blogging by the actors, myself, and the spectators in relation to the show also marked a democratisation of power from professional theatre reviewers to members of the public – and this was again echoed in the post-performance talk with Schimmelpfennig which was widely publicised. The post-performance event allowed as much time on audience questions as time on formal discussion with Schimmelpfennig and Gray, who was interviewing him. This celebration of interaction and discussion outside of the theatre production itself is an example of Richard Sennett's dialogic interactions.[234] The discussions between actors, audience and theatre company, alongside the openness and demystification of the production process, are paralleled in the kinds of effects which the production's dramaturgy created. Practices based on empathy, intersubjectivity and engagement were already being played out in the production's rehearsals and the company's engagement decisions.

Migration on Stage

[234] Sennett.

The Golden Dragon was one of many plays about migration produced in British Theatre from 2008-2016. Liz Tomlin suggests, for example, that there was a 'significant growth' in the number of companies producing work about migration during this time. She offers as examples:

> Banner Theatre – *Wild Geese* (2005) and *The Get Free Mobiles ... Don't They?* (2007); Red Room Theatre – *The Bogus Women* (2001) and *Unstated* (2009); Ice and Fire – *I Have Before Me a Remarkable Document Given to Me by a Young Lady from Rwanda* (2003) and *Crocodile Seeking Refuge* (2005); and Cardboard Citizens – *Pericles* (2003) [...][235]

Alison Jeffers too acknowledges the recent growth in the number of theatre companies and performances engaging with the idea of migration and associated questions of asylum. She suggests that

> [t]he politics of asylum in this unique historic moment have combined with a newly vigorous political theatre to create a strand of work that questions and expands both the boundaries of theatrical form and the ways in which theatre seeks to influence political and social debate [...] However, it is not enough to talk simply of formal developments in theatrical and other art forms, although these are considerable. Innovation and experimentation in refugee theatre has been introduced in the main to expedite and enhance the engagement of this theatre with its audience. The need for strong and immediate impact coupled with the perceived necessity to educate and inform, as well as

[235] Tomlin, p. 11.

> to entertain, means that questions of audience are uppermost in the minds of theatre makers.[236]

Jeffers covers a variety of different theatrical forms in her book, and in particular looks at verbatim theatre (where the words of real people are recited on the stage, verbatim). However, the Brechtian influenced theatre of Schimmelpfennig (which I will describe below) as realised by ATC is formally distinct to any performance she considers.

In the Theatre Studies academy and in the wider theatre world, there are growing debates as to how these plays might be politically productive. As Jeffers suggests above, these debates are often framed around how the audience might interpret and understand performance. In her book on theatre and migration, Emma Cox suggests that

> [t]heater is about [...] challenging the furtive and presumptuous look of the culture of surveillance with *eye-to-eye meeting of equal beings*. The urgent and timely imperative is to mount a direct challenge to the ingrained and totalizing gaze of white supremacy, which has determined that people who look a certain way and come from certain countries have the right to travel and an unlimited economic horizon, while people who look another way and come from other countries will have no right to travel and will never be allowed to participate on an equal economic footing.[237] [my italics]

[236] Alison Jeffers, *Refugees, Theatre and Crisis: Performing Global Identities* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 149.
[237] Emma Cox, *Theatre and Migration* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. viii–ix.

She suggests that the intersubjective look between spectator and actor is a counter to white supremacy. Ramin Gray argued something similar during a post-performance talk for *The Golden Dragon*:

> The play is basically five white actors empathising with the other. The audience witness that process. That is morally positive. Theatre has a positive social effect – it teaches good behaviour. Imaginatively transfers ideas, teaching knowledge vicariously.[238]

Looking at or witnessing the work of actors portraying the Other on stage is seen as ethically positive, although here Gray presents a decidedly didactic argument for the theatre. I am sceptical about the mere act of spectating theatre being inherently ethical. John Keefe uses Lévinasian ethics to argue that when done correctly theatre can be

> [...] an ethical economy of regard rooted in the material and social body in mutual and reciprocal concert; [...] it rests on the complicit, knowing empathetic imagination located and manifested in the engaged but distanced spect-actor as agent who witnesses the work of the actor in the arena we call theatre.[239]

However, I distrust the assumption that theatre is inevitable positively ethical because of the face-to-face encounter. As Nicholas Ridout suggests

[238] Christine Twite, 'Roland Schimmelpfennig Post-Show Talk Transcript', *ATC's The Golden Dragon*, 2011 <https://thegoldendragonatc.wordpress.com/side-orders/roland-schimmelpfennig-post-show-talk-transcript/> [accessed 18 May 2016].
[239] John Keefe, 'A Spectatorial Dramaturgy, or The Spectator Enters the (Ethical) Frame', *Performing Ethos: International Journal of Ethics in Theatre & Performance*, 1.1 (2010), 35–52.

> [using Lévinas to theorise theatre] is problematic because it loses [...] much of what is distinctive in Lévinas. It removes the unknowability and anonymity of the face; it dilutes the absolute quality of the demand to infinite responsibility; it obscures the idea that the self comes into being only through this encounter with, and infinite subjection to, the other [...] [Lévinasians might suggest that] this 'misappropriation' is simply a lazy form of mundane liberalism, in which we are wearily enjoined to be nice to each other, and is thus of no use to anyone.[240]

Ridout argues that Lévinas's face is unknowable and anonymous: it is the very fact that the spectator cannot fully understand the Other, and the unease this causes, through which the ethical possibilities are created.

The idea that simply seeing is ethically productive occurs elsewhere in theatre scholarship. Aleks Sierz, in *Rewriting the Nation*, also suggests that during the 2000s the newspapers, 'even the liberal press', were 'wavering in its sympathy [for migrants]', so it was 'left to theatre-makers to give an insight into the experiences of asylum-seekers and other migrants'. [241] He links the 'insight' (a term based on the ocular sense) into experiences of migration with a productive sympathy, implicitly suggesting that seeing these experiences produces an ethical sympathy. In 2016 Mark Ball, Artistic Director of LIFT (London International Festival of Theatre), whose office was next door to ATC's at the ICA at the time, announced LIFT's 2016 festival. This was just at the time of the European 'migration crisis', when the number of asylum seekers coming into the European Union doubled from 2015 and 2016.[242] The group of productions chosen for 2016 LIFT were all explicitly or implicitly related to the theme of migration. The 2016 festival included *On The Move*, a play by a

[240] Ridout, *Theatre and Ethics*, p. 55.
[241] Aleks Sierz, *Rewriting the Nation: British Theatre Today* (London: Methuen, 2011), p. 115.
[242] Editorial Staff, 'Why Is EU Struggling with Migrants and Asylum?', *BBC News*, 3 March 2016 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-24583286> [accessed 23 May 2016].

collective of artists focussing on stories of people forced to leave their homes, and *Empathy Museum*, where 'installations and events explore how empathy can have the power to transform personal relationships and tackle global challenges'.[243] Ball stated in an interview that

> [...] the focus is on empathy for this year's festival [LIFT 2016] is really important ... It came about due to two reasons, one is what is happening globally with the mass movement of people across the continent and the treatment of migrants and refugees. There is a clear lack of empathy that is affecting the lives of these people ... [The other is that] there is a growing body of evidence that with our stream based, individualistic culture we are living increasingly atomized, slightly disconnected lives. We are spending time staring at our phones rather than looking at people's faces - that in itself is actually leading to a lack of empathy and neuroscientists are telling us that it's limiting our ability to be empathetic. I think the convergence of these factors has made artists really interested in this issue. [244]

Ball suggests that we are literally 'looking' in the wrong place – at our phones, rather than people's faces. The ability of theatre to make the spectator look directly at another person's face, and therefore to present a connection or empathy which is ethically positive, is again reminiscent of Keefe's pseudo-Lévinasian theatre. Ball's use of the term empathy is interesting here, because his definition relies on the importance of human interaction, live, in the moment – disconnection is linked to mediatisation of culture. Empathy is in peril because we are looking at objects, rather than at other people. He implies that theatre is the art form to help correct this because it is based on live audiences watching live actors, whilst other media that might investigate ideas of migration,

[243] Honour Bayes, 'The Theatre of Empathy: Artistic Director Mark Ball on LIFT 2016', *Run Riot Blog*, 2016 <http://www.run-riot.com/articles/blogs/theatre-empathy-artistic-director-mark-ball-lift-2016> [accessed 23 May 2016].
[244] Bayes.

including cinema, television, art, photography and literature, is necessarily less valuable as it does not include the important ability for its audience to *see* the *live* person in front of them.

Ball's point about the neuroscientist's interest in this topic is reflected back in a recent turn towards cognitive investigation in Performance and Theatre Studies, led by the work of Bruce McConachie.[245] McConachie's recent theatre research has been informed by the discovery that the motor neurons which are fired in the brain of a person performing a specific movement are mirrored with similar motor neuron activity in the brain of a person watching the movement. This led to investigations into how this mirroring might extend to emotions, as emotions are often portrayed physically by the body in movement.[246] Applying neuroscience's discovery to the theatre, *looking* and *seeing* can produce a reflection of what the Other is doing or feeling in the spectator.

However, there is another argument which suggests that looking and seeing *too* closely can in fact obfuscate wider political issues. This argument is partly indebted to Debord's deadening *Society of the Spectacle*, and ways of thinking which connect looking with passivity, as critiqued in Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator*.[247] Rahila Gupta discussed why the period from 2008 to her time of writing (2010) saw the production of a large number of plays focussing on migration on the British stage.[248] She linked this interest with the

> [...] growing popularity of political theatre, and may have been specifically triggered by 2007's bicentenary of the end of the slave trade, which reframed and refocused the debate

[245] McConachie, 'Doing Things with Image Schemas'; McConachie, *Engaging Audiences*.
[246] G Rizzolatti and V Gallese, 'Resonance Behaviors and Mirror Neurons', *Archives Italiennes de Biologie*, 137.2–3 (1999), 85–100.
[247] Debord; Oliver Davis, *Jacques Ranciere* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).
[248] Rahila Gupta, 'It's Time for Immigration Plays to Take on the System', *Guardian*, 27 September 2010 <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2010/sep/27/plays-about-immigration-tackling-system> [accessed 17 May 2016].

– that modern-day slavery, in the west at least, is directly connected to a lack of immigration status.[249]

By 'political theatre', a wide and unspecific term, she seems to mean plays dealing directly with contemporary British issues through formally realist modes and 'intimate' stories. For example, she cites plays such as the National Theatre's *England People Very Nice* in 2008, a state-of-the-nation play about the history of migration; a double bill of plays by Rukhsana Ahmad and Oladipo Agboluaje*, Footprints in the Sand*, also produced in 2008 at the Oval; and *Unstated* at the Southwark Playhouse in 2009, a play based on verbatim texts from true testimonies of migrants.[250] Each of these plays, Gupta argues, 'explor[ed] intimate spaces and how these may sometimes be skewed by institutional forces', but, importantly, unlike 'playwrights like David Hare, Brecht and, most recently, Lucy Prebble with *Enron*, [who] have satirised complex systems of criminal justice or capitalist finance', none of these plays about migration and immigration have been able to consider the system 'responsible for their indignities', focussing instead on the specifics 'of certain situations'.[251] These plays, Gupta suggests, 'ha[ve] been particularly good at evoking the pain of individual stories: of loss and upheaval, terrifying journeys, [of migrants'] arrival on foreign shores expecting refuge but facing hostility and indifference in the shadow of wealth'.[252] The plays evoke pain. They evoke loss. Gupta argues that the migration plays she cites produce a short-term emotional response in the audience but do not help the audience develop an understanding of the specific histories which caused these events and therefore are politically unhelpful. The emotional response created by the intimacy of the relationship between audience and performer in the theatre is seen as something unproductive. In opposition to Ball, Sierz and Cox, she posits sympathy, the intimate recognition of

[249] Gupta.
[250] For a full list and links to the plays, please see her article.
[251] Gupta.
[252] Gupta.

the Other by the spectator, as a negative, encouraging the audience to focus on small-scale stories rather than dealing with the larger wrongs of the political systems which have created them.

Gupta draws comparison between the 'intimate' and specific nature of the stories within the contemporary plays she cites, and the plays of Brecht, Hare and Prebble, who she suggests are all able to consider the wider 'system' (in these cases, specifically, the economic system of capitalism). Whilst she is calling for a theatre which addresses the political decisions which have caused the problems of migration and immigration, she does not suggest a specific formal or dramaturgical structure in which to do so. Indeed, her grouping of Brecht, Hare and Prebble represents a wide variety of formal inventiveness – Brecht's epic, historicising theatre; Prebble's satirical and non-realist theatre as seen in *Enron*; and, implicitly, Hare's *The Power of Yes*, a play which dramatised the author himself interviewing key figures in the financial crisis. Emotional engagement by the audience itself is not politically productive to Gupta, whereas in Ball's thinking the act of the audience looking directly and closely at a situation produces intellectual engagement, and is the reason why performance is so important in discussing migration and immigration.

Sight, looking and emotion are inextricably linked to considerations of migration and illegal immigration when one considers the media debates around how the press present their stories about the issues. In 2015, *The Guardian* published a photo of three year old Alan Kurdi, a refugee, whose body was washed up on the shore after the boat he was travelling in sunk in a failed attempt to journey from Turkey.[253] There was a noisy reaction on social media about whether the photo should have been published. On one side, the image's publication was positively received and it was suggested that the horror it caused fuelled criticism directed at EU and individual governments' inaction over the migration crisis. On Twitter, the picture became a 'top trend', as did its accompanying hash-tag #KiyiyaVuranInsanlik (humanity washed ashore). The little boy was figured

[253] Jamie Fahey, 'The Guardian's Decision to Publish Shocking Photos of Aylan Kurdi', *Guardian*, 7 September 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/07/guardian-decision-to-publish-shocking-photos-of-aylan-kurdi> [accessed 27 May 2016].

as a representation of all human suffering. Alongside this, *The Guardian* published an article entitled 'It is people and stories that move us, not statistics', arguing that the turn-around in public opinion about the migrant crisis – from a sense of panic at potential numbers of migrant refugees to a sense of horror at the tragedy – was directly related to the publication of this image.[254] The article argued that where descriptions of the intricacies of the immigration system had not affected public opinion, this single image of the drowned boy was able to change everything. It worked as 'an astonishingly vivid demonstration of the inadequacy of statistics to move our moral sentiments compared with the power of pictures, and still more of pictures that bring to life stories, to affect us in ways that reasoning never could'.[255] In opposition, some found the picture too shocking and disturbing, causing anger against the paper that published it, rather than against the problems of migration:

> *The Guardian* received emails from at least a dozen readers, many of whom felt the decision to publish the "disturbing" pictures unpixellated – and alongside, rather than behind, a warning online – was a step too far.[256]

It is striking that this controversy repeats similar differences of opinion found in writing about theatre depicting migration. Ball encourages us to stare straight into the eyes of these stories, effectively arguing that if we look at the right things it improves our ethical understandings of the situation, and increases our humanity, although, importantly, Ball rejects the mediatised image because he viewed it as innately decreasing our ability to empathise: for him, theatre is the only art form to correct this. Gupta sees the depiction of the specific, horrific, individualised story as

[254] Editorial Staff, 'The Guardian View on the Refugee Crisis: It Is People and Stories That Move Us, Not Statistics', *Guardian*, 4 September 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/04/the-guardian-view-on-the-refugee-crisis-it-is-people-and-stories-that-move-us-not-statistics> [accessed 27 May 2016].
[255] Editorial Staff, 'The Guardian View on the Refugee Crisis'.
[256] Fahey.

emotionally stultifying to the audience: the real structures of the problems become irrelevant in the face of such emotion, and the audience are not informed about the reasons and workings of the wider social and political situation.

The Golden Dragon and the Audience

My 2011 case study is well situated in this debate. If we are to believe Ramin Gray, *The Golden Dragon* falls into the category of plays which elicit emotional reactions from the audience to promote a feeling of humanity and intersubjectivity with the characters on stage. Gray has stated that the play is important because of the way the actors *empathise* with the characters they play, and how the audiences are *witnesses* to this action. In his director's note to the text of *The Golden Dragon* he encapsulates this idea:

> [*The Golden Dragon* is] a piece that tackles a topical issue like migration ... rather than hitting us over the head with the journalistic, transient rights and wrings of the situation, [it] takes us by the hand and leads us into a hall of mirrors where, [and] with only our sense of empathy to navigate and distinguish, we piece together a poignant and important story for our global age ... [The play] asks us to look at actors as humans and see *all* the possibilities, both past, present and future that lie within them, be they age, gender or race. In that full act of seeing lies the chance for all of us to be expanded and humanized in a powerful, collective moment.[257]

[257] Schimmelpfennig, *The Golden Dragon*, p. n.p.

These are substantial claims indeed, for theatre and for *The Golden Dragon*. Gray celebrates the importance of the audience 'look[ing] at actors' and developing a 'full act of seeing', again emphasising the ocular nature of this encounter. He suggests that the act of spectatorship, and therefore theatre more widely, is innately ethically positive, because seeing one person 'empathise' with another on stage encourages the spectator to be similarly empathetic in the way he or she responds to and imagines other people. Again, seeing and looking are essential to Gray's understanding of the working of empathy. Theatre makes audiences look in the right direction, and look in an ethically better way; the act of looking leads directly to an empathetic engagement with the stories enacted on stage.

Gray's use of empathy in these excerpts seems to be linked to a mirroring of emotion and experience, just as the functioning of mirror neurons work. Empathy 'imaginatively transfers ideas' from the actor to the spectator, and it does so 'vicariously'. The word vicarious here is telling: its various meanings listed in the Oxford English Dictionary all imply passivity on the part of the person who is having the vicarious experience: they take on the emotions or experiences of the other, acting as passive vessel rather than an active agent.[258] A vicarious experience is '[b]ased upon the substitution of one person for another', or 'takes or supplies the place of another thing or person; substituted instead of the proper thing or person'.[259] In this last definition, the 'person' is equivalent to the 'thing' – both are objects, metonymic vessels for the other. Gray's audience in this description are passive and innately submissive to the narratives on stage. His imagining of a 'humanized, [...] collective moment' reinforces this thinking: in being an audience member, one becomes metonymically transformed into a part of a whole human experience. To be 'humanized' implicitly suggests that the audience is unhuman, dehumanised, or nonhuman before. Through the 'collective' the audience can become humanized. The vicarious experience, wherein one becomes a passive vessel, is counter intuitively the only way to access humanity. One becomes objectified to, in

[258] 'Vicarious, Adj.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/223102> [accessed 27 May 2016].
[259] 'Vicarious, Adj.'

turn, become human. Only in togetherness is humanity revealed: actively stepping away from the whole, claiming difference, produces a dehumanising effect on the subject. Gray's account of a humanity based on togetherness echoes the constructions of homogenous or 'thick' community interrogated by Olssen, Nancy and Blanchot.

These two instances of Gray's thinking read ironically given his own agonistic methodologies and the content of the work produced under his directorship of ATC. But Gray problematises his definition of what it is to be human even as he advances it, by envisaging *The Golden Dragon* as a 'hall of mirrors' where the audience 'piece together' reality.[260] This image is of a circus hall of mirrors, where visitors' reflections are enlarged, minimised, thrown upside down and manipulated. A mirror, even when considered as a household object rather than a fairground attraction, never replicates reality in any case: it reverses and distorts it. Thus Gray complicates his own idea of sympathy, whereby the affectual expression of the emotions on stage is replicated in the bodies of the spectators.

Gray also uses the name of Bertolt Brecht in his preface to the text of *The Golden Dragon*, who is known for his use of the *Verfremdungseffekt*, which is anecdotally described as a technique to suppress sympathy in the theatre audience, as sympathy stops the audience from thinking logically about the wider historical movements which have led to the occurrences on stage. Gupta's argument above can be read in the light of Brecht in this regard.[261] The title of the preface is 'Better than Brecht' and in it, Gray argues that Schimmelpfennig is writing within a German tradition.[262] In the style of the play he reaches 'back to Brecht'.[263] Reviews for the production also mentioned its 'German' aesthetic, with the Telegraph noting the play's 'modern-day take on Brecht'.[264] I now want

[260] Schimmelpfennig, *The Golden Dragon*, p. n.p.
[261] Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, trans. by John Willett (London: Methuen, 1964), pp. 94–95.
[262] Schimmelpfennig, *The Golden Dragon*.
[263] Schimmelpfennig, *The Golden Dragon*.
[264] Dominic Cavendish, 'The Golden Dragon - Review', *Telegraph*, 3 October 2011 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/8804856/The-Golden-Dragon-North-Wall-Oxford-and-touring-review.html> [accessed 18 May 2016].

to dissect what Gray might mean by referencing Brecht alongside the notion of spectator empathy, and examine how the play and his production works within this seemingly contradictory conception of *The Golden Dragon*. This is particularly relevant because Brecht's insistence on the importance of historical and political context is also framed in terms of the visual: seeing through a *wider lens*, putting things *in perspective*.[265] I contend that Gray uses a Brechtian dramaturgy as a way of encouraging the audience to consider their encounter with the Other. I suggest the structure of *The Golden Dragon* both remind the audience of the need to watch carefully and try to engage with the Other on stage, whilst at the same time acknowledging the inability to ever fully understand another person. Thus I return to my central thesis of the importance of dialogical encounter in ATC's work from Richard Sennett's *Together.* I suggest that *The Golden Dragon* in performance seeks to emphasise the difficulties of understanding the Other but also foregrounds the importance of maintaining dialogue.

Empathy and Sympathy

The terms empathy and sympathy have been used interchangeably by the critics cited above to mean both a helpful, ethically productive kind of audience engagement and a deadening, short-term kind of audience engagement with the image of the Other presented in migration plays. It is useful to repeat Iris Marion Young's analysis from Chapter One here, which demonstrates the importance of defining these two terms differently in relation to community:

> The ideal of community [...] privileges unity over difference, immediacy over meditation, sympathy over recognition of one's understanding of others from their point of view. Community is an understandable dream, expressing a desire for selves that are transparent

[265] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 145.

> to one another, relationships of mutual identification, social closeness and comfort. The dream is understandable, but politically problematic [...] because those motivated by it will tend to suppress differences among themselves or implicitly exclude from their political groups persons with whom they do not identify.[266]

Here Young offers the word 'sympathy' to mean a mirroring of emotion. Young's 'sympathy' is different to empathy, which she implicitly suggests is a 'recognition of one's understanding of others from their point of view'. For her, empathy is *seeing* from another person's point of view, whereas sympathy is simply replicating the feeling of the Other and is therefore unproductive. Explanations of the differences between these two ideas are continually framed in terms of the visual: it is common to describe empathy as seeing from the *perspective* of the other, seeing from another's angle, or, as Young describes it as an understanding of a situation from their *point of view* – a metaphor so imbedded in the English language that the phrase has become a cliché.

Bruce McConachie offers a similar succinct interpretation of the two words, which conforms to Young's understanding and reiterates the link between sight and empathy:

> [...] most scientists [...] identify empathy as the cognitive operation by which one person can come to know about what the other person is intending and feeling [... empathy] is a kind of mind reading which allows the person to step into the shoes of another and experience that person's world from her or his *point of view* [...] This notion of empathy as *perspective taking* differs from the commonplace view that confuses empathy with sympathy ... empathy is not an emotion as sympathy is [...] empathy may lead to a feeling

[266] Iris Marion Young, p. 300.

> of care and concern but empathy can also lead to antipathy, the opposite of sympathy.[267]
>
> [My italics]

McConachie also points out the importance of empathy in the creation of community, in that empathy 'was an important early cognitive tool to facilitate social interaction'; similarly, Richard Sennett, explains the term empathy as central to his understanding of a dialogic interaction.[268] Simply put, McConachie figures empathy as being able to see a situation from the same point of a view of another, but that point of view is used to *inform* the person's analysis of the situation, rather than simply *becoming* their whole analysis of the situation, or creating what they feel.[269] These explanations of the two terms will inform my analysis of the dramaturgy of *The Golden Dragon*, and complicate the claims that that Gray makes about it in performance.

Better than Brecht?

In order to understand Gray's claims, it is useful to consider in more detail Brecht's equation of audience empathy with an inability to critique the political system which underlies a dramatic narrative. In a binary familiar to most theatre students, Brecht terms theatre that relies solely on emotional reflections between spectator and actor 'dramatic theatre', whereas theatre which enables spectators to consider the wider system of power in relation to the dramatic narrative he

[267] Bruce A. McConachie, *Theatre and Mind* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 15.
[268] McConachie, *Theatre and Mind*, p. 15.
[269] A full historical investigation into the meanings of empathy is beyond the scope of this thesis, but is considered in this recent publication: Lindsay Cummings, *Empathy as Dialogue in Theatre and Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

terms 'epic theatre'.[270] In his essay 'Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction' Brecht argues that

> [t]he dramatic theatre's spectator says: Yes, I have felt like this too – Just like me – It's only natural – It'll never change – The sufferings of this man appal me, because they are inescapable – That's great art; it all seems the most obvious thing in the world – I weep when they weep, I laugh when they laugh.
>
> The epic theatre's spectator says: I'd never have thought it – That's not the way – That's extraordinary, hardly believable – It's got to stop – The sufferings of this man appal me, because they are unnecessary – That's great art: nothing obvious in it – I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh.[271]

McConachie's understanding of sympathy – a replication of emotion – could thus be equated to Brecht's ideas of the dramatic theatre, and McConachie's notion of empathy with the epic. Instead of 'I laugh when they laugh', Brecht encourages the opposite – 'I weep when they laugh'.[272] Confusingly, in the widely-used translation of Brecht on Theatre by John Willett, empathy is repeatedly translated to mean that the audience uncritically reflects emotion depicted on stage. Thus Willett reads Brecht's description of non-Aristotelian theatre as not dependent on empathy:

> [...] in Germany for plays of a non-aristotelian (not dependent on empathy) type as part of the attempts being made to evolve an epic theatre. The efforts in question were directed to playing in such a way that the audience was hindered from simply identifying itself with

[270] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*.
[271] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 71.
[272] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 71.

> the characters in the play. Acceptance or rejection of their actions and utterances was meant to take place on a conscious plane, instead of, as hitherto, in the audience's subconscious [...][273]

Willett again translates Brecht as writing that '...actors are accustomed to rely primarily on the spectator's empathy, which means exploiting his most easily-accessible emotions...'.[274] Later, Brecht qualifies his views on 'empathy' as follows:

> A considerable sacrifice of the spectator's empathy does not mean sacrificing all right to influence him. The representation of human behaviour from a social point of view is meant indeed to have a decisive influence on the spectator's own social behaviour. This sort of intervention is bound to release emotional effects; they are deliberate and have to be controlled. A creation that more or less renounces empathy need not by any means be an "unfeeling" creation, or one which leaves the spectator's feelings out of account. But it has to adopt a critical approach to his emotions, just as it does to his ideas. Emotions, instincts, impulses are generally presented as being deeper, more eternal, less easily influenced by society than ideas, but this is in no way true. The emotions are neither common to all humanity nor incapable of alteration; the instincts neither infallible nor independent of the reason; the impulses neither uncontrollable nor spontaneously engendered, and so on [...] A character's piecemeal development [...] produces a rich and

[273] Bertolt Brecht, 'Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting', in *Brecht on Theatre*, trans. by John Willett (London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 91–99.
[274] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 100.

> sometimes complicated emotional curve in the spectator, a fusion of feelings and even a conflict between them.[275]

Here again, Willett's translation of Brecht terms empathy what McConachie describes as sympathy – emotions mirrored by spectator from performer. Brecht's thinking developed through his lifetime and cannot be understood as one grand theory, but it is useful to understand that epic theatre is usually meant by Brecht to provoke the spectator adopt a critical approach to his emotions, rather than to repress emotion completely from the experience. According to Brecht, if the audience simply reflects the emotions on stage in their own experience this confirms that the activities on stage are timeless, part of 'humanity', similar to all and thus unchangable.

Critics continue to use Willett's translation of empathy in their writing. Augusto Boal states, in an essay about Brecht that

> [...] empathy is the emotional relationship which is established between the character and the spectator and which provokes, fundamentally, a delegation of power on the part of the spectator, who becomes an object in relation to the character: whatever happens to the latter, happens vicariously to the spectator.[276]

Empathy is equated with objectification, passive replication of the emotions witnessed on stage. In an early chapter of the recent book *Brecht in Practice*, David Barnett suggests the differences between sympathy and empathy in a similar way to McConachie, but then undermines this position by suggesting that Brecht distrusted empathy because

[275] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, pp. 100–101.
[276] *Theatre in Theory 1900-2000*, ed. by David Krasner (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 384–85.

> [...] empathy is immune to differences in contexts: a person empathises with a worker and an aristocrat in the same way (that the person might choose to respond differently to the experience of empathy afterwards is another matter entirely) [...] [277]

But the experience of empathy, in McConachie's interpretation, is predicated on the spectator's ability to respond *differently* to the emotions seen on stage. These confusions around the concept of empathy are reminiscent of the many different understandings of alienation evident in Brecht's work. Marx uses alienation as a term to describe the objectification of the worker, alienated from the work itself and from the realities of the historical specificity of his/her situation.[278] Willett's translation of Brecht uses the term *Verfremdungseffekt* or alienation quite differently, to represent a positive process, whereby the audience are made see outside the specifics of the dramatic narrative and understand that events are not timeless truths but are constructed in and by particular historical circumstances. Hence Brecht's concept of alienation has been linked to being unfeeling and mechanical, when in fact it is something rather different: it does not deny empathy, in fact empathy as McConachie has defined it is a usefully informs an understanding of Brecht's epic theatre.

The Golden Dragon does have a number of Brechtian features, particularly if we understand Brecht to be in support of what McConachie describes as empathy. It is politically and thematically anti-capitalist, and depicts the way in which each of the characters are objectified and made passive by the system within which they are working. The play's dramaturgical structure also builds on Brecht's formal structures of epic theatre and alienation. *The Golden Dragon* is the first play in which Schimmelpfennig uses actors to play completely against type, and whilst Gray describes this as actors empathising with the Other, I contend that this theatrical self-consciousness productively

[277] David Barnett, *Brecht in Practice: Theatre, Theory and Performance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 65.
[278] Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. by Martin Milligan (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2012), p. 72.

emphasises the difficulties which the actors have in becoming the characters they play. In this way, the play confronts the problems inherent in the process of sympathising, rather than simply offering sympathy as a panacea for late-capitalist society's lack of community.

Figure 5. Annie Firbank as THE WOMEN OVER SIXY and Adam Best as THE YOUNG MAN in *The Golden Dragon* (dir. Ramin Gray, 2011), Photo by Stephen Cummiskey.

The Golden Dragon in performance

In one of the first scenes of *The Golden Dragon*, the actor playing THE YOUNG MAN dons some thick-set glasses and picks up the walking stick to play character of the old man. He makes his voice high-pitched and squeaky. He shakes, and bends his body over as if stricken with arthritis. The actress playing THE WOMAN OVER SIXTY puts on a hair-band with a bright flower on her head. She sways around, full of energy and with a look of child-like innocence. The scene runs as follows:

THE WOMAN OVER SIXTY:

Next to the old man on the balcony a young woman, not yet nineteen. She is strikingly young and strikingly beautiful.

She says:

What is it, Granddad, what would you wish for?

THE YOUNG MAN:

The old man looks at the young girl.

My granddaughter. I look at my granddaughter.[279]

Several things are happening in this one moment of dialogue. Here the two actors narrate and observe their characters and their actions before they become the characters and speak in the first person. As Brecht argues for epic theatre:

> The actor will occasionally look at the audience as if to say: 'isn't it just like that'? [...] The audience identifies itself with the actor as being an observer, and accordingly develops his attitude of observing or looking on.[280]

Similarly, the striking use of stage properties works in ways akin to Brecht's suggestion that '[t]he artist's object is to appear strange and even surprising to the audience, [... e]veryday things are

[279] Schimmelpfennig, *The Golden Dragon*, p. 23.
[280] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, pp. 92–93.

thereby raised above the level of the obvious or automatic.'[281] The difference in age between the real body of each of the actors, and of the characters they play, invites an audience reaction: that of laughter at the absurd. When the actors speak in character they do so in a naturalistic mode: the old man later talks hauntingly of his lost youth, while the granddaughter tries desperately to understand his feelings. Set against this is the reality of the bodies in performance: the actors are not only completely different ages to the characters they perform, but the performances work as comic stereotypes of age and youth. THE WOMAN OVER SIXTY girlishly stands lightly on her feet, whilst THE YOUNG MAN, crooked and bent, looks into the audience to deliver his lines. A walking stick equates to old age, just as a girlish flower becomes a metonym for the young fertile girl, in something similar to the Brechtian gestus.[282] Caricature relies on an exaggeration of key traits of the person caricatured. The props act as objectified metonyms of the characters, but also as properties of caricature. The naturalistic dialogue between the two characters works creates a friction with the caricatured nature of the actors' performance. This offers a playful problem for the spectator: how does one respond to something both caricatured and nuanced, to a figure both objectified but individuated through the dialogue? This is something slightly different to what is encouraged in Brecht's writings. He specifically warns against caricatures in the actions of the actors on stage:

> To achieve character rather than a caricature, the actor looks at people as thought they were playing him their actions, in other words as though they were advising him to give their actions careful consideration.[283]

[281] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 92.
[282] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, pp. 198–201.
[283] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 54.

In possibly his most quoted work, *A Short Organum for the Theatre*, he even mentions actors playing parts meant for a different sex: but importantly suggests that this should be a technique for the rehearsal room rather than for performance itself:

> If the part is played [in rehearsal] by somebody of the opposite sex the sex of the character, the character will be more clearly brought out; if it is played by a comedian, whether comically or tragically, it will gain fresh aspects. By helping to develop the parts that correspond to his own, or at any rate standing in for their players, the actor strengthens the all-decisive social standpoint from which he has to present his character [...][284]

At every performance of *The Golden Dragon* I witnessed, the image of THE WOMAN OVER SIXTY describing herself as 'strikingly young and strikingly beautiful' always raised a nervous laugh from the spectators. Adam Best who played THE YOUNG MAN tweeted about this effect, stating

> that was fun.The audience briefly thought they were watching a farce, it seemed, which is brilliant. Genuinely brilliant. #thegoldendragon[285]

This was echoed in an audience member's tweet, who stated that

[284] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 197.
[285] Twitter, @MesserBest, 29/08/2011

> Schimmelpfennig. Tushingham. The Golden Dragon. Arcola. A tragedy camouflaged as a farce and an excellent show. @arcolatheatre[286]

The ocular senses of the audience see a farcical, caricatured representation, whilst in the dialogue they hear the poetry of a much more nuanced characterisation. The granddad and granddaughter talk of age and aging, the granddaughter speaking the line 'what am I going to look like then –' whilst the granddad replies that:

> THE YOUNG MAN:
>
> I'll be dead and buried a long time before then.
>
> He laughs desperately.
>
> I'll be dead and buried a long time before then.[287]

The audience are literally and figuratively presented with doublings that contradict each other with different appropriate responses. There are three layers of doubling: the actors playing a role and then inhabiting a different character; the reality of the actors' bodies doubled against the characters which they are playing; and finally, the poetic dialogue of the scene versus the sparse representation of that scene through the use of properties. There is no clear resolution which defines these different visual and figural representations of the characters in the story: confusion is created where the audience are not sure of what they are seeing or how to react to it. They are being shown different ways of reading the characters simultaneously.

[286]Twitter, @Coylerh 29/08/2011
[287] Schimmelpfennig, *The Golden Dragon*, p. 24.

The scene also focuses on the grandfather's great wish. He does not explicitly say what his one wish would be, but his preoccupation with ageing against the youthfulness of his granddaughter suggests a deep longing to be other than he is. This is a kind of wishful sympathy, a desperation in the grandfather to divest himself of his body in order to become the opposite to what he is now. The grandfather both can and cannot achieve this metamorphosis: he *is* in the body of a young actor, so his longing reads as ironic; as the character he is *not* young and will be unable to return to his youth. Thus time in this scene is also doubled, strangely elastic; in the actor's body the grandfather returns to youth while at the same time, the character remains cemented in the present.

The scene also uses repetition and doubling in the dialogue. THE YOUNG MAN narrates that 'The old man says: if I could have one wish' before then repeating the words in character – 'If I could have one wish.'[288] Repetition of key events is a feature of much of Schimmelpfennig's work. When asked about this in an interview reproduced in his *Plays One* he explains that

> [it's] often important to me to examine certain aspects of a story over and over again together with the reader or the audience from different perspectives.[289]

Schimmelpfennig is not talking of literal perspectives here of course, but the repetitions in his work usually mean that the audience experiences the same event in different ways, recalling that at first glance an observer may not be able to understand all the important features of an event. In *The Golden Dragon* the fact that the cast play against type means that this doubling of 'perspective' is enacted not just through repetition, but through the performance's presentation of simultaneous, differing representations of the characters.

[288] Schimmelpfennig, *The Golden Dragon*, p. 23.
[289] Schimmelpfennig, *Schimmelpfennig: Plays One*, p. 5.

The scene of the grandfather and the granddaughter is a good example of the formal structure of the play. *The Golden Dragon* stages alienated characters in a Western metropolis; the Chinese boy and the air hostess yearn for identification with the people around them. The play's dramaturgical structures situate the spectators in a comparable trap, unsure how to identify with the characters or respond to the narrative.

In scene 24, the two air hostesses are played by THE MAN OVER SIXTY and THE MAN, who mince around the stage flicking back their long wigs as if in a shampoo advert, caricatures of femininity. Whilst the grandfather and granddaughter are trapped in timeless a reality, the air hostesses represent the way that cheap air travel and the ubiquity of global brands has meant that distance and location have become as meaningless as time has become for the grandfather and granddaughter:

THE WOMAN OVER SIXTY:

The long flight across the Ocean, you can see on the screens how the plane creeps up the West Coast of Africa at five hundred miles per hour.

THE MAN:

...Whenever I fly across the Atlantic, I always think of sharks.

THE MAN OVER SIXTY:

But when you look out the window you don't see much.

...

THE YOUNG MAN:

The meal is served, there's a choice of chicken fricassee or pasta.[290]

The sense of movement for the airhostesses is mediated by the plane's computer screen, as country after country passes below them. The meal served on the plane is similarly unspecific, being dishes from a variety of different cultures. In a later scene THE MAN OVER SIXTY playing the airhostess remarks to the other that '[the] best Asian soup I ever had was in San Francisco'; culinary dishes from specific cultures have become completely disconnected to the location of their creation – just as The Golden Dragon restaurant is a Westernised generalisation of 'Thai/Chinese/Vietnamese' food.[291] Distance and location have become unimportant in the contemporary globalised world and the air hostesses gloss over a relentless list of African countries as they make the journey onwards:

THE MAN:

And once they've flown over Angola, Gabon, Liberia and Sierra Leone and they've got as far as Gambia and Senegal and Mauritania, Inga, one of the stewardesses, says to Eva, the other one, look down there,

...

Ease of travel around the world for the Western population, as explored in the figures of the two air hostesses, is depicted as producing a generalised, homogenised view of other cultures and other people. On the plane, the world below is literally homogenised, 'you can see on the screens how the plane creeps up the West coast of Africa at five hundred miles per hour.'[292] Suddenly, one of the air

[290] Schimmelpfennig, *The Golden Dragon*, p. 53.
[291] Schimmelpfennig, *The Golden Dragon*, pp. 57, 25.
[292] Schimmelpfennig, *The Golden Dragon*, p. 53.

hostesses spots something, '...a boat! A boat full of people, can't you see it?'.[293] This could be a reference to people trafficking, illegal migration or even just a dream, but the air hostess is unable to come to any decision as they are so far away, her view is literally too generalised, and she seems to quickly forget this potentially disturbing image. The air hostess does not want to dwell on the issue and look closer. There is a strong implication that boat is full of illegal migrants, and that their journey to move around the globe is presented as absurdly difficult and different to that of the air hostesses. The people on the boat are as small as ants to the air hostesses, generalised and inhuman. The production is again playing with perspective: the two air hostesses are unable to see reality because they are too far away. As they sit in the restaurant of The Golden Dragon they are within meters of the tragic events occurring to the Chinese boy but even here they do not, despite their physical proximity, become aware of it. In a development of Brecht's insistence on the importance of being shown events on a scale that demonstrates the workings of the ideology which produced them, the literally wide view of the air hostesses has made them unable to connect at all to the potential tragedy occurring beneath them.

As I suggested earlier in this chapter, critics and artists have argued about the virtues of looking 'closely' at the issue of migration in a way that produces sympathetic and emotional response, versus seeing the issue in 'larger scale' terms of the global workings of capital and migration movements. *The Golden Dragon* sees this not as a dichotomy but as a spectrum, and suggests that both the generalised fable of the ant and the cricket, and the specifics of the other narratives, point to the importance of continually changing one's perspective: in *The Golden Dragon*, one view can never be the whole picture.

The story of the ant and the cricket is recognized in Western culture through its inclusion in the canonical Aesop's fables and it is also referenced in the Old Testament.[294] In it the diligent, hard-working ant works to store food over summer, whilst the cricket spends its time singing. Once

[293] Schimmelpfennig, *The Golden Dragon*, p. 54.
[294] Proverbs 6.6-9, 30.24-5.

winter time approaches, the cricket is left with no food, whilst the ant has the resources to last through the winter. The tale is performed by two of the actors: the actor in the role of the 'THE YOUNG MAN' narrates the part of the cricket, donning two sparkling feelers on a head band to present the role, while THE WOMAN OVER SIXTY plays the ant. The ant reprimands the cricket:

> You didn't do a day's work all summer.
>
> Not a single day...
>
> You'll get nothing from me.[295]

This is how the fable ends, with a hard rebuttal of the cricket by the ant. But in *The Golden Dragon* the ant and the cricket continue in conversation. The ant begins to bargain with the cricket, asking first for her to '[d]o some cleaning' in exchange for food and shelter, until eventually the ant 'rents the cricket out to other ants.'[296] The performers narrate disturbing scenes about the sexual abuse of the cricket, taking the fable in a violently different direction to Aesop. Towards the end of the performance, the audience are shown the way this narrative interconnects with the others in the play: the ant is in fact the shopkeeper living next door to the restaurant, who has one of the restaurant worker's sister, an illegal immigrant, held captive as an enforced prostitute in his flat, unbeknownst to the worker who is desperately trying to find her. The ant and the cricket enlarge and mutate into the characters of the Chinese girl and the shop owner. The perspective suggested by the beginning of the fable is brutally exchanged for the narrative of the sexual abuse of the girl. An abstract fable with animal characters twists into a specific human reality. Otherwise disconnected characters from the different stories meet each other in this narrative: a grandfather

[295] Roland Schimmelpfennig and Translated by David Tushingham, The Golden Dragon (London: Oberon Books Ltd, 2011), p. 31.
[296] Schimmelpfennig and Tushingham, pp. 41, 43, 45.

and a man with the pregnant wife who live upstairs both meet the shopkeeper to purchase time with the cricket/Asian girl. The performer representing the man with the pregnant wife narrates the following:

> And then he treated the cricket not like a cricket, but like a thing, that can be paid for and that doesn't matter if it gets broken. He probably treated the cricket the way he would have liked to have treated his pregnant girlfriend.[297]

This objectification is repeated in a literal way in a later scene, where the cricket/Asian girl is represented simply by the broken glittery feelers on the ground. The Asian girl begins as an anthropomorphised animal, is revealed to be one of the integral characters to the other stories in the performance, and is then is objectified into a plastic stage prop thrown on the floor.

This idea is repeated in the final scene of this story, when the cuckolded husband meets the Asian girl. He narrates:

> You look like a Chinese grasshopper. Amazing. What a vision, in the middle of the night. Suddenly a whole foreign continent is standing in the room.
>
> You bring thousands of years of history with you!
>
> History, you understand?
>
> China. The Great Wall. The Forbidden City. The desert. The Yellow River. The Silk Road. The invention of gunpowder and the printing press. That's all China. One billion Chinese.

[297] Schimmelpfennig and Tushingham, p. 66.

Short pause.

That's where you're from. Isn't it? You do come from China?[298]

Again, the Asian girl is dehumanised and objectified as both the cricket and as a foreign continent. The 'continent' of China (sic) is a conflation of familiar images of China known in Western culture: its tourist spots, its key historical moments relating to the West's own development. This reification of culture reiterates and expands the Asian girl's objectification. She becomes representative of capitalism's (and globalisation's) ability to turn cultural identity into a simple formula, whereby the complexities of social and personal reality are erased.

ATC's production of *The Golden Dragon* emphasised the unknowability of the Other, recalling the Lévinasean concept of the Other described in Chapter One, whereby an encounter with the obfuscated face of the Other reinforces the impossibility of complete intersubjectivity. ATC's Brechtian practice did not simply highlight the political context of *The Golden Dragon*'s dramatic narratives, but offered a disconcerting reminder that looking at a subject, from any angle, can reify one particular viewpoint. ATC's Brechtian dramaturgy reminded the audience constantly to change the angle they take from which to look at any situation or in an encounter with any Other. *The Golden Dragon* offered the audience the ability to 'see' the story from a constantly changing position. This, I contend, is ethically productive and demonstrates in practice the kind of dialogical encounters which Richard Sennett emphasises as important in the creation of functional, contemporary communities.

During the final moments of the play, the air hostess looks over the bridge into the river (figured in Gray's production as the audience). At this point in ATC's production, the air hostess was no longer presented through caricatured gesture. She had lost her farcical, stereotypical exterior. She put the boy's tooth in her mouth to taste its blood. She spat the boy's tooth out into the river

[298] Schimmelpfennig, *The Golden Dragon*, p. 82.

(the audience), just as the lights began to come up to signal the end of the performance. The performance ends on a hope and a desire: the air hostess desires knowledge of the Other, the Chinese boy – her discovery of the tooth has led her to consider his existence. She has not come face-to-face with the boy at any point, but this fleeting glimpse (and taste) of the Other, his shadowy presence in her life, is enough to make her consider what this encounter might mean. The air hostess is an embodiment of the spectator, thinking about the Other. The final act of spitting the tooth into the audience heightens this connection: the ideas of the play are handed over to the spectator, they now are offered to be masticated over by the audience.

Ethnicity in The Golden Dragon

The all-white casting of *The Golden Dragon* came under criticism after the production's premiere: critics argued that in a play with Asian characters, Asian actors should have been cast. In particular, there was a debate which took place in the comments section of the Time Out review (the comment section has since been deleted, but I was able to record all responses). The main critic was David Tse, founding member of Yellow Earth Theatre, whose mission is to

> [...] identify and invest in BEA emerging and established actors, writers and directors and nurture and champion those artists, supporting them to make groundbreaking work that will increase the visibility and profile of BEA theatre in this country and beyond.[299]

Tse commented on the production:

[299] 'Yellow Earth Theatre', *Yellow Earth Theatre*, 2016 <https://yellowearth.org/about-yellow-earth/> [accessed 6 October 2018].

> While I have no doubt about the quality of the writing, direction and acting, wouldn't this "yellow face" casting (white actors playing East Asian characters) work equally well the other way round, using five well-spoken British East Asian actors to play the various characters, "as well as the white Westerners who make cruel use of them"? Wouldn't that "alienating technique" be more innovative / post-modern, rather than the current safe casting? [...]The heart of this debate is equal opportunities.
>
> Gray raises a red herring about realism/naturalism vs imagination/empathy. Of course actors can play anything and theatre can be any form. [...] What is "tired, clichéd and prejudiced" is the standard response of maintaining the status quo. [...] The German writer is examining the outsider/insider dynamic in this play. How much more complex that could be, transposed to the UK, where some members of British ethnic minorities identify with the mainstream and say, "No more immigrants".
>
> By casting in such a safe, 19th century way, Gray has avoided any complexities of modern Britain. Instead, he reinforces that his tribe is dominant [...] The UK is much more diverse than Germany, especially casting possibilities, and any director working in the subsidised sector owes a responsibility to the UK taxpayer to give value for money, follow the law and apply equal opportunities, especially towards a radically under-represented sector. *[sic]* [300]

Tse's criticism seems to stem from the idea that a diverse cast of people from both dominant and minority ethnic groups would have better reflected the multicultural make-up of London in 2012,

[300] 'The Golden Dragon | in London', *Time Out London*, 5 September 2011, sec. comments <https://www.timeout.com/london/theatre/the-golden-dragon#tab_panel_3> [accessed 6 October 2018].

and that using an all-white cast simply reinforced the 'outsider/insider dynamic'.[301] Accusations of yellowface also appeared on Twitter, in particular in repeated tweets from @MadamMiaow who put a link to Lyn Gardner's positive review of the production, saying 'Good to see the Guardian & Lyn Gardner defending the right of British Chinese to remain invisible. Again. http://bit.ly/qFFbYi #yellowface'.[302]

This debate was reignited when Music Theatre Wales toured their operatic version of the play in 2017, which led to Hackney Empire to cancel the planned run because '[t]he debate aroused by the non-Asian casting in The Golden Dragon compromises the Empire's commitment and position as a champion of diversity and accessibility across the theatre industry'.[303] Music Theatre Wales also issued an apology, stating:

> Featuring Caucasian singers as performers playing multiple roles, some of whom are specified as Asian characters, has caused offence. These errors of judgement were ours alone [...] We realise that we should have reflected more deeply on the implications it had for the kind of production we made. Music Theatre Wales' work is undoubtedly challenging but we have never set out to offend. This is a transformative experience for the company and one from which we are determined to learn. [304]

Whilst it is beyond the scope of thesis to write a full account of the complexities of this issue, the debate raises important questions about community and race in contemporary Britain.

[301] 'The Golden Dragon | in London'.
[302] Twitter, @MadamMiaow 07/09/2011
[303] Damien Gayle, 'Hackney Empire Pulls out of Chinese Takeaway Opera over All-White Cast', *Guardian*, 12 October 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/oct/12/chinese-takeaway-opera-golden-dragon-hackney-empire-all-white-cast-music-theatre-wales> [accessed 15 December 2017].
[304] Staff Editors, 'Opera Cancelled over Non-Asian Roles', *BBC News*, 13 October 2017 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-41608800> [accessed 6 October 2018].

To clarify these issues, I contend that neither Tse nor Gray advocate that *The Golden Dragon* should have colour blind casting, which Young describes as casting which

> [i]gnores the appearance of an actor, her "colour", and hires the most skilled performer for each part. It is a practice anchored in the belief that talented actors can play any role and, more specifically, can quickly convince spectators to overlook whatever gaps exist between themselves and the characters whom they play.[305]

Actually, the debate is about what actors should have been cast to reflect the Western capitalist world represented by the actor's bodies on stage, and is not about colour blind casting. Tse argues that there are second and third generation Asian people who consider themselves firmly part of the Western capitalist world, and who are equally able to objectify the East, and that this should therefore be reflected in the casting. Schimmelpfennig argued that in Germany there were very few Asian actors, but in the UK this is not the case.

The text of *The Golden Dragon* does not specifically state the race of the actors, but it does state what their age and sex should be. Gray argued in the post-show talk that this to ensure that the actors are playing against type, an important element of the production. Gray said that he did audition a Nigerian actor for this role but he and the casting directors felt this would be confusing for an audience.

Of course, if an Asian woman played A YOUNG WOMEN then she would still be playing against type in all her roles. There is perhaps the implicit assumption here that the actors denoting 'man' or 'woman' in the text will be white Westerners, a construction of whiteness as neutral or normative. In fact Schimmelpfennig himself in the post-show talk explicitly says that the actors should be white Westerners, saying that

[305] Harvey Young, *Theatre and Race* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 56.

> The play shows the story from the white Westerners' point of view against the 'Other'. Casting white Westerners is a specific technique to make them play opposite, to create more identification.[306]

Gray refutes the idea that actors can ever close the gaps between themselves and who they play:

> However much a white actor tries to be Chinese they will always fail, just as an actor will always fail at being Macbeth or a murderer or whatever. But it's the attempt to be something else that's most interesting here.[307]

As related earlier, the actors first approached the stage at the beginning of the play as if they were members of the audience, with Adam Best, in certain performances, texting on his phone. The lighting design was such that there was no differentiation between stage and auditorium, and where auditoria allowed it, audience members had to walk over the stage to find their seats. The audience was thus meant to equal the cast: but at venues where audiences reflected the diversity of Britishness now, this foregrounded the cast's whiteness still further.

Whatever position one takes on these debates around casting for *The Golden Dragon*, they exemplify agonistic dialogue in action. Gray wrote, in (now deleted) comments below the Time Out review in response to criticisms:

[306] Twite, 'Roland Schimmelpfennig Post-Show Talk Transcript'.
[307] David Pollock, 'English-Language Version The Golden Dragon Set for Edinburgh 2011', *The List*, 26 July 2011 <https://edinburghfestival.list.co.uk/article/35888-english-language-version-the-golden-dragon-set-for-edinburgh-2011/> [accessed 6 October 2018].

> [...] the author will be seeing the show at the Arcola this week and will be taking part in a post-show conversation with Graham Whybrow after the performance this Thursday Sept 15th. Come along and heckle: I think we should have the conversation.[308]

And later in an interview with *The List* stated that

> [t]here's already a lot of very formal theatre work about the issue of migration, which is a huge topic which affects us all, but this play doesn't do anything as banal as cast judgement on it. What it does is allow the audience to emotionally engage with other lives, it gives them something to think about and feel. It's not a political play.[309]

Again, Gray states, 'It's full of playfulness, imagination and a really profound humanity'. [310] These assertions can read as a defensive attempt to privilege a generalized 'humanity' in the theatre, as if this might trump any argument that had emerged about race and casting. My own position is that the casting could indeed have been more multi-racial, to reflect the variety of racial backgrounds of British citizens. Moreover, the notion of an essential 'profound humanity' reads in distinct contradiction to the agonistic communities Gray's work has deliberately sought to create on stage and in the theatre auditorium. However, his defence of the all-white cast for The Golden Dragon is, I contend, rooted in the play's critique of Western inabilities to ethically encounter the Other. The production was essentially about this inability, rather than about the subjective experience of a multi-racial group of people. Those who objected to the casting were understandably angry about the lack of representation of this subjective experience in the theatre.

[308] 'The Golden Dragon | in London'.
[309] Pollock.
[310] Pollock.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have considered *The Golden Dragon* as one of the many plays about migration produced in British Theatre from 2008-2016. As I have demonstrated, empathy and sight are often invoked in dialogues about plays of migration during this period. I highlight the arguments about what these plays might be 'looking at' in the popular press and in theatre studies, and how they might be asking an audience to look. One argument emphasises the positive ethical affects of portraying specific examples on stage in close emotional detail, which often invokes an idea of sympathy – sometimes confusingly termed empathy - to suggest how the audience might emotionally engage with the characters on stage. Other arguments emphasise the positive ethical effects of presenting the issue of migration on stage in broader terms, to highlight the specific contemporary causes of migration; these arguments have rejected sympathy as stultifying and depoliticising. I have explored Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, a technique anecdotally used by Brecht to suppress sympathy in the theatre audience, but which is fact a complex technique that foregrounds the historical specificity of the moment but does not try to deny the audience's emotional reactions.

I have suggested that ATC's production builds on Brecht's dramaturgy, and have described the effects Gray was aiming to create in *The Golden Dragon*. The production emphasised the unknowability of the Lévinasean Other, and the ethics created in the moment of encountering its obfuscated face. *The Golden Dragon* the impossibility of ever fully knowing the Other, whilst emphasising the imaginative leaps needed to begin to understand it.

Chapter Four: *Crave* by Sarah Kane and *Illusions* by Ivan Viripaev

Introduction

The double bill of Sarah Kane's *Crave* and Ivan Viripaev's *Illusions* (toured 2012) seems very different in concept to *The Golden Dragon* at first glance. Both *Crave* and *Illusions* present intimate, domestic scenes. The characters are grappling with their own identities and their intimate relationships with important Others in their lives. The plays are not about specific contemporary issues like *The Golden Dragon*, with its stark portrayal of the alienating effects of late capitalism. *Crave* and *Illusions* both deal with emotional rather than historically specific political matters. However, in this chapter I will suggest that the plays' focus on the striving for intimate connection between lovers and family members is presented as another iteration of the difficulties in creating community and intersubjectivity presented in *The Golden Dragon*.

The central argument of this chapter is that the dramaturgy and narratives within *Crave* and *Illusions* are consciously constructed by ATC to unsettle the audience. *Crave* is demanding to watch because it does not have a coherent narrative structure, whilst *Illusions* suggests at first the performance will follow a recognisable, sequential narratives but gradually parts of the plot are undermined or revealed to be false, destabilising the coherence of the narrative for the audience. Seeking coherence, balance and understanding is also a central theme in both plays: the voices in *Crave* all appear to crave a meaningful encounter with another person, something which will solve their own feelings of dissolution, and the male characters in *Illusions* seek something similar in their quest for 'true', requited love, which they believe will produce a relationship of complete understanding with another. The desire for unity with another, of complete intersubjectivity, is presented as an understandable yet unproductive desire (and in fact something which leads to the

breakdown of relationships in *Illusions*). To explore the kinds of connection so deeply craved in the characters of the double bill, I draw on Aristophanes' model of the split androgyne, each half desperately seeking the other to recreate their lost wholeness, along with Lacan's theorisation of the mirror stage and Bauman's community as paradise lost. The concepts of self and community explored and troubled in these writings are dependent on complete symbiosis with the Other.[311]

I suggest that ATC's productions of these plays aimed to reproduce the characters' desire for coherence within the body of the spectator. The post-modern text of *Crave*, and Gray's staging of it, encouraged the ultimately hopeless desire in the audience to create a coherent narrative or objective meaning from the performance where there is none to be found. After the interval, the audience was guided to sit on the stage itself to watch *Illusions*, where for *Crave* they had been sitting in the auditorium. In the eye-contact between spectator and spectator, spectator and actor made possible by shared light, the audience was made particularly aware of their reactions to the performance and their relationships to the people around them. This audience's self-consciousness was heightened by the way in which the performers in *Illusions* suggest to the audience that the play will follow a recognisable narrative format but then gradually undermine details of the plot on which the coherence of that narrative is based. The change in the seating arrangements was choreographed to make the audience self-conscious about their efforts to understand the performance; like Bauman's subjects searching for community unity and intersubjectivity they no doubt strove to respond fully and in the right way - an understandable desire which the double bill deliberately withholds. Goffman's idea of the frames of performance in everyday life is pertinent here: in *Illusions* it is unclear what kind of genre framing, and therefore what kind of polite audience response, is required.[312] As we will see, both thematically, through the plays' narratives, and phenomenologically, through the change in perspective created by the seating change, Gray's work

[311] Plato, *Plato: The Symposium*, ed. by Frisbee C. C. Sheffield, trans. by M. C. Howatson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Jaques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience', in *Jacques Lacan Écrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 2001), pp. 3–9; Bauman, *Community*.
[312] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin, 1990).

was again suggesting that a complete intersubjectivity with the Other is an unobtainable end and an unproductive concept. As in Sennett's dialogic exchange, and Mouffe's antagonistic democracy, empathetic attention to the Other is emphasised as ethically important, but disagreement and difference are equally vital.

The Double Bill in Performance

Kane's *Crave* is the fourth of her five plays; it marked a distinctive change in her writing style from the previous three plays *Blasted* (first performed 1995), *Phaedra's Love* (first performed 1996) and *Cleansed* (first performed 1998). Her first plays have garnered a reputation for explicit onstage violence and dystopic horror and led to her categorisation as a 'new brutalist', or, more popularly, a proponent of 'In-yer-face Theatre' as coined in Aleks Sierz's book of the same name.[313] *Crave*, written and produced in 1998, broke completely with Kane's past work. Gone was a coherent narrative structure, any stage directions or any named characters. Instead the text is more like a prose-poem, with fragmented utterances by four voices: C (performed in the ATC production by Rona Morison), M (performed by Derbhle Crotty), B (performed by Cazimir Liske) and A (performed by Jack Tarlton). The play consists of each of the four voices taking turns to speak lines of dialogue. The only exception comes in the middle of the performance, where there is one long soliloquy by A about his (or her) hopeless, overbearing love for someone.[314] Through the performance some semblance of characterisation occurs: M seems to be a mother, perhaps in a relationship with a younger man B; C seems to be figured as a child and A as a dysfunctional, violent individual. But these voices are given letters rather than names, provocatively not A, B, C, D but M, A, B, C, which teasingly suggests that the letter do mean something specific, so that they can be interpreted as

[313] Aleks Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001).
[314] Kane, pp. 169–70.

different voices from one psyche, or simply as collaged verbal images from a variety of different contexts. The greater part of the text deals with intimate stories or exclamations concerning love, sex, fidelity, yearning and depression. There are moments of violent and explicit language, describing paedophilia, suicide and rape, which bristle against more benign imagery of romantic love and compassion. There are lines in different languages, and quotations from both high and low culture (most obviously from T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Shakespeare, new and old testament excerpts and popular music and films from the 1990s). Some parts of the text are provocatively impenetrable: for example, A suddenly says 'MNO', C says 'ES3' and B '199714424': as A says, 'I keep trying to understand but I can't'. [315]

ATC's staging of the production was constructed to heighten this impenetrability for the audience. Each actor stood stock-still and spoke each line in a peculiarly detached and dispassionate way, dressed in night-attire as if sleep-walking or unable to sleep. Gray's version differed significantly from the other two well-known productions of *Crave*: Vicky Featherstone's original 1998 production for the Royal Court which had the four speakers sit as if 'within the genre of a television chat show', and Thomas Ostermeier's 1998 German version, which saw each of the four speakers each to an oblong cat-walk like strip of stage in which they were caged like animals, taking turns to step up to microphones placed at the end nearest the audience. [316] The opening of each performance was indicated to the audience by a slow black out accompanied by a ticking noise, which got louder and louder until it was unbearable, at which point it stopped and the play began. The ticking was reminiscent of a ticking clock in the middle of the night. This, and the costuming, was perhaps a nod to *4.48 Psychosis* which explores the night time imaginings of one suffering from depression and psychosis.[317] As David Greig suggests, *4.48 Psychosis* refers to the

[315] Kane, pp. 184, 187, 188, 171.
[316] *Sarah Kane in Context*, ed. by Laurens De Vos and Graham Saunders (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p. 75; Schaubühne Berlin, 'Crave Directed by Thomas Ostermeier', *Schaubühne Berlin* <http://www.schaubuehne.de/en/produktionen/gier.html> [accessed 9 July 2016].
[317] Kane, pp. 203–45.

> [...]period of depression [when] Kane had found herself awoken, every morning, at 4.48am. She took this moment, the darkest hour, just before the dawn, and found in it a moment of great clarity when the confusions of psychosis seem to evaporate.[318]

The blocking and the actors' costumes suggested that their narratives were waking dreams. Their strange and impenetrable lines could be read as a psychoanalyst might read a dream: as the royal road to the unconscious, portraying drives and desires disguised by imagery and symbolism, strange egoic masks disguising the id's truth beneath.[319] On the stage there was a full-length mirror situated stage left, and stage right there were some helium balloons and a box of tissues. This strange assemblage of objects reinforced the dream trope: each seemed carefully placed as if symbolic, but it was never made clear exactly what each symbol stood for. The tissues evoked sadness, the balloons, weightlessness, fragility, disconnection, and the mirror provocatively stood to reflect a skewed image of the audience members themselves: but, as in the mirror image, nothing was clear. The actors each stood facing the audience, each lit face-on by a separate domestic-looking angle-poise lamp which made them look pale and washed-out. They appeared exposed, in pain, speaking confessional text in a hypnotic monotone manner. At times the actors' lines seemed to be spoken in response to each other, but they each remained still and facing forward. The only exception to this was when A gave his soliloquy. At this point the other three actors gradually turned around to stare at him. The deliberation of the moment suggested to the audience that the dramaturgical decision had been made for a reason – but it was unclear what this meaning was.

[318] Kane, p. xvi.
[319] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. by James Strachey, Alan Tyson, and Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1977).

Figure 6. The cast of *Crave*, North Wall Arts Centre (dir. Ramin Gray, 2012), Photo by Nina Sologubenko.

During the interval the audience were asked to vacate the space to whatever front-of-house facilities were available at the venue: in Canterbury, a large, warm café offering organic meals in the heart of the grassy campus; in Bristol, a slightly cramped and dark holding area next to the theatre where a vending machine offered fizzy drinks and snacks. When the audience were called back in for Illusions, they were invited without prior warning to sit, not in their original seats, but on chairs arranged in a fan shape on the stage itself, looking out at the now-empty auditorium. As the spectators entered the space the four actors from *Crave* were already seated on the stage in front of the block of seating, welcoming people back and casually chatting to each other, sipping tea and, in the case of Liske, tuning up an electric guitar. This was a complete change to the hypnotic personae of *Crave*. Each of the actors wore their own casual clothes – worn-in, comfortable – of a similar kind to many of the spectators walking in. This technique was reminiscent of the opening of *The Golden*

Dragon, where I suggested the actors were figured to be confused with members of the audience. The beginning of Illusions was not marked by an obvious lighting cue or movement by the actors, although the house lights in the auditorium were dimmed.

Ivan Viripaev is a director, screenwriter and playwright who is well known in Russia and Eastern Europe but little performed elsewhere. Viripaev and his wife were named 'People of the Year' in Poland in 2011.[320] He has won several major awards for his work including the prestigious Golden Mask, the Presidential Council Prize for Literature in Russia, and awards at the Venice, Warsaw and Sochi film festivals. His plays include *July* (2006), a monologue of a serial killer, performed by a woman on a bare stage, and *Delhi Dance* (2010), a tale of four people in a doctor's waiting room merging dance and dialogue which was subsequently made into a film in 2012). His works are often shockingly violent and always consciously reject naturalism. Cazimir Liske both translated and acted in *Illusions*. Born in Denver, USA, he trained at the Moscow Art Theatre and directed his own version of *Illusions* in New York after appearing in ATC's production.[321]

Illusions recounts the story of two married couples' lives, described in the third person by the four actors on stage, who take turns to relate the narrative. The play begins with 'First Woman' (played by Derbhle Crotty) describing elderly Denny's final dying words to his wife Sandra. Denny explains how Sandra's love through the years has taught him that 'true love can only be mutual love': this is what he has enjoyed all his life with Sandra.[322] As the story progresses, each of the other actors take turns to describe different parts. It soon follows that unbeknownst to Denny, Sandra has been in love with Denny's best friend Albert all her life – completely undermining the charm of the first story. This fact she only reveals to Albert on her deathbed, and she suggests that this means that true love does not need to be requited. She states that love

[320] Viripaev, p. n.p.
[321] Liske died unexpectedly in 2017, and this thesis is dedicated to him.
[322] Viripaev, p. 9.

> [...] means to wish for nothing for yourself, but only to give. My love for you taught me that giving is much more important than demanding something for yourself.[323]

The rest of the play describes Albert, and Albert's wife Margaret's, reactions to these events, interspersed with stories from the couples' earlier lives. After Sandra has admitted her love for Albert, Albert decides that he has, in fact, been in love with Sandra all his life too. He tells Margaret that he never loved her, as true love can only be requited love. Margaret reacts to this revelation by revealing that she has been having an affair with Denny – and she agrees with Albert that true love can only be requited love. Further stories are told of important points in the couples' lives: of Denny seeing a flying saucer when he was young, of Denny and Sandra's trip to Australia and their travels in the outback, of Albert's first use of the drug marijuana, and of Margaret one day strangely hiding in a wardrobe from her husband and her difficulty in articulating why this moment was important to her. One story involves Margaret asking Denny to be her lover and Denny refusing her. It is here that it is revealed to the audience that she was lying to Albert when she said she had had an affair with Denny. Finally, the narrators tell the audience that they are about to explain how the story ends. Albert returns to Sandra's deathbed to tell her that true love must be requited because he, in fact, has always loved her. He adds the example of Denny and Margaret's love for each other and describes their affair to confirm this theory. With this thought, Sandra dies – her emotions are not described but the news completely undermines Denny's speech of love to her at the beginning of the play, and the spectators are invited to consider that Sandra may have died of shock and sadness at this news. Walking back to his house, Albert suddenly realises that he does love Margaret. He returns to tell her this, but finds that Margaret has hanged herself. Her suicide note reads:

[323] Viripaev, pp. 12–13.

> I decided to do this because I have entirely ceased to understand how everything functions here. I don't understand how everything fits together, what follows what. I can't see the reasons why everything moves forwards, develops. I can't find order[...] There has got to be at least some kind of permanence in this enormous, shifting universe, Albert? [...] Love can be unrequited love, because I, for my whole life, loved you[324]

The narrators describe that ten years later Albert dies, staring at the sky, thinking again about Margaret's plea that there has to be some kind of permanence in the universe. The play ends with the Second Man stating simply:

> That's how Albert died. And all this came to an end. Goodbye.[325]

[324] Viripaev, pp. 41–42.
[325] Viripaev, p. 42.

Figure 7. Photograph taken from the lighting box showing audience set-up, *Illusions*, Traverse (dir. Ramin Gray, 2012), photographer unknown.

In *Crave*, it is impossible for a spectator to gain a full understanding of the narrative; the same could be said of *Illusions* but for different reasons. The actors spoke directly to the audience throughout the play. Their delivery of the text had similarities to children's story narrators or self-help guides. As the complexity and tragic nature of the narrative became apparent, the naivety of the narrators' delivery seemed more out of place. As the First Woman finished the first dialogue, she said to the audience '[t]hat's it. A little story', sounding as if she has narrated a pleasing anecdote rather than carefully deconstructed a married couple's happiness.[326] This effect was further enhanced by the actors appearing openly and genuinely as 'themselves' from the beginning of the performance, dressed in casual clothes and chatting to the audience. The shared space was

[326] Viripaev, p. 13.

reminiscent of a safe therapy space where leaders guide the group into gentle self-understanding and calm; yet the narrative ends in images of futility, suicide and emptiness. Theatre critic Lyn Gardner likened the performance to a 'cosy story-telling' session at first, but one which becomes increasingly Brechtian in its capacity to confuse and challenge the audience; it is clear some of the characters in the story may not be telling the truth, reminding the audience of the play's fictitiousness.[327] The manipulative power of the actors was emphasised still further when the actors themselves seemed to begin to play with the 'facts' of the narrative. The First Man begins to undermine his own narratives. He suggests that Margaret has cancer, and that lovers Sandra and Denny were brother and sister, but then brushes each admission off as a 'little joke' (echoing the faux naive tone of the First Woman's 'little story').[328] This does two things. Firstly, it draws attention to the fact that these seemingly casual moments of narration are carefully constructed to reveal that these are untrustworthy narrators, characters who can manipulate and change the story. In performance, it also emphasised the uncomfortable dissonance between the style of narration and content of the narrative: in this 'cosy story-telling' context, the First Man presented the possibility of cancer or incest as a 'joke'. Meaning for the audience is at first contingent on believing the narrators to be disinterested, genuine tellers of the play's story, and this belief is undermined as the performance proceeds.

Like the characters in *Illusions*, the audience are encouraged to consider whether a complete understanding of the Other (in this case the narrators of the story) is ever possible. As Sandra explains, she

> realised that life is composed of these tiny, multicoloured fragments. That life holds nothing whole, just these paltry, tattered pieces, that there's no single plot, just a

[327] Lyn Gardner, 'Crave/Illusions – Review', The Guardian, 18 May 2012, section Stage <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2012/may/18/crave-illusions-review> [accessed 12 July 2013].
[328] Viripaev, p. 16.

> multitude of episodes, that there's nothing central, just trivialities and details. And that all these details can't seem to converge into something complete, into something consummate.[329]

Conventionally, a theatre audience are led to follow a central narrative, a 'single plot', based on an intersubjectivity between the actors and themselves. I contend that Gray and ATC consciously use the dramaturgy and narratives of *Crave* and *Illusions* to remind the audience of the impossibility of intersubjectivity. As we have seen, *Crave* is demanding to watch because it hints at but ultimately does not have a coherent narrative structure, whilst *Illusions* suggests at first the performance will follow a recognisable, sequential format but gradually the coherence of the narrative is destabilised for the audience. The impulse to seek coherence and intersubjective understanding is also a central theme in both plays: the voices in *Crave* all crave meaningful encounters with another person, something that will solve their own feelings of dissolution, and the male characters in *Illusions* seek something similar in their quest for 'true', requited love, which will produce a relationship of complete understanding with another. The drive for intersubjectivity and complete absorption with an Other is framed in terms of community by Bauman, who suggests that

> "Community" is nowadays another name for paradise lost – but one we dearly hope to return, and so we feverishly seek the roads that may bring us there.[330]

Bauman captures the incessant longing (or craving) for this paradise, but also warns that it is unachievable. For in '[b]eing human, we can neither fulfil the hope [of community] nor cease

[329] Viripaev, p. 25.
[330] Bauman, *Community*, p. 3.

hoping'.[331] Nancy, Blanchot and Agamben see in the idea of unity with the Other something which suppresses debate and productive difference. Human relations, they argue, and in particular the idea of community, can only be based around relationalities which allow for difference in order to avoid the suppression of personal freedom. Nancy warns against this suppression, calling for an

> [...] incessantly present moment at which existence-in-common resists every transcendence that tries to absorb it, be it an All or an Individual (in a Subject in general).[332]

The productions of *Crave* and *Illusions* ultimately share Bauman's empathy with the desire for cohesion, but like Nancy, Blanchot and Agamben suggest that this cohesion is unobtainable and ultimately destructive.

Choosing *Crave* and *Illusions*

During the first year of Ramin Gray's tenure as Artistic Director of ATC he instigated a monthly script reading session with members of staff. Gray picked several scripts for each of these meetings for everyone to read and consider, then talk through at the meeting. Almost every script was written within the last ten years, and was frequently a translated work from a European writer. Writers included Black British writer debbie tucker green, African-America Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, Germans Nis-Momme Stockmann and David Gieslmann, Russian Ivan Viripaev and Norwegian Arne Lygre. The first meeting included Sarah Kane's *Crave* and Roland Schimmelpfennig's *The Golden Dragon*, which became respectively ATC's first and second productions under Ramin Gray. Ivan Viripaev's *Illusions*, translated by Cazimir Liske, was read in one of the sessions four months later and

[331] Bauman, *Community*, p. 5.
[332] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. xi.

was to be chosen as a the sister production of *Crave*, to be played together around Britain. The plays recommended were in keeping with Gray's background in European and contemporary drama: as I narrate in Chapter Two, he had directed a wealth of theatre experience in the continent, along with spending 2000-2009 at the Royal Court as International Associate and then Associate Director.[333]

The production was a practical choice for the company. It required no specific scenery or set and could therefore be staged and toured at relatively low cost. Each play is under an hour long in performance, and can be produced alone or together with an interval, ensuring that as many receiving theatres as possible could take the production. In this chapter I focus on the pairing of the two productions, as first envisaged by Gray, although at certain times *Crave* and *Illusions* have been performed separately by the company. The pairing of Kane and Viripaev as writers is an intriguing match. As Gray noted in an interview in Bristol, Viripaev and Kane would be almost exact contemporaries if Kane were alive today; they were both born in the early 1970s.[334] Kane's work has become canonical in Britain, and is often included in A-level English and Drama syllabi, and in the curricula of University Drama and English departments, although the plays themselves are more regularly performed on European stages rather than British ones.[335] ATC were able to book a number of dates at university theatres – including Bristol's Wickham Theatre and the University of Kent's The Gulbenkian – partly on the drawing power of Kane's name.[336] According to Nick Williams, ATC producer, Ivan Viripaev's work was then well-known within the British industry, but was little heard of among British theatre academics, and had never previously been produced in this country.[337] Williams also stated that the RSC and the Royal Court had both been considering staging

[333] 'Ramin Gray'.
[334] Ramin Gray, 'Ramin Gray on Crave and Illusions', *Bristol Old Vic Blog*, 2012 <https://bristololdvictheatre.wordpress.com/2012/04/18/its-rare-to-find-work-that-talks-so-directly/> [accessed 30 November 2016].
[335] The current syllabi for A-level are: www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/drama/a-level/drama-and-theatre-7261 and www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/drama/a-level/drama-and-theatre-7262.
[336] Interview with Producer Nick Williams at the ATC Office, 2013.

[337] 'Interview with Producer Nick Williams at the ATC Office'..

Viripaev, but had not found the right piece of writing.[338] With *Illusions'* small cast and short running time, ATC were able to secure the rights for the first ever performance of a Viripaev piece in Britain in English and between March and June 2012, ATC rehearsed and toured the two new productions around Britain. *Crave* was rehearsed at the Jerwood Space in Southwark for three weeks before it was premiered at the North Wall Centre in Oxford, then the company embarked on a short tour to Lincoln, Newcastle and Manchester.[339] In mid-April rehearsals started for *Illusions* in Out of Joint's rehearsal space near Finsbury Park, North London. *Illusions* was performed with *Crave* from late April to May in Bristol, Swansea, Hull, Eastleigh, Folkestone, Canterbury, York and Edinburgh. [340]

The fact that Kane and Viripaev were two near-contemporary writers from completely different cultural backgrounds is significant: it suggests that it is not only British audiences who are implicated in the issues of contemporary cosmopolitan community that the pairing explored. This is not to say that the plays offer some essentialist, transcultural construction of the human condition, but rather that people from different cultural backgrounds can engaged in productive dialogues. The two plays work as dialogue between each other and the issues I raise in this chapter capture some of the many possible dialogues the audience/reader could construct from them. The *Crave* and *Illusions* double bill is an example of the dialogic in action: the plays raise questions about desire and intimacy enhanced through their juxtaposition. Like Sennett's dialogic interaction and Mouffe's antagonistic democracy, both the plays themselves and the pairing highlight the importance of exchange, listening and reflection, whilst rejecting the need to form a synthesis of ideas or values.[341]

The Dialogic Space of Rehearsal

[338] 'Interview with Producer Nick Williams at the ATC Office'.
[339] Christine Twite, 'Christine Steps Into Crave Rehearsals', *ATC Website Blog*, 2013 <http://www.atctheatre.com/blog/the-events-rehersals> [accessed 30 November 2016].
[340] For full tour details, please see: Actors Touring Company, 'Actors Touring Company Official Website'.
[341] Sennett; Mouffe, *Agonistics*.

I sat in on rehearsals for both productions and was able to scrutinise Gray's theatre-making process across the pairing. However, it was the complexities of the text of Crave that brought up the issues of cohesion, meaning and intersubjectivity most acutely, so these rehearsals are the focus of the following section.

Crave was the first production to be rehearsed, in late March 2012 in the Jerwood Space, a series of rehearsal rooms in a refurbished Victorian school in Southwark, South London. The Jerwood Space has its own particular sense of community; it is a state-of-the-art rehearsal space, which offers a significant reduction in room rates through its charity, the Jerwood Foundation.[342] There are a number of different available spaces, which means that at any one time there can be a range of different companies working there, from commercial West End companies to the smallest theatre group with no core funding. The space also serves as an art gallery, with event spaces and a café open to the public. When ATC were rehearsing *Crave*, we came across a ballet company, a West End theatre production in the final weeks of rehearsal, and a number of well-known actors and actresses who seemed to have just come to visit. The sense of energy produced by this blend of creative activities added a new liveliness to the ATC's own rehearsal process. The playfulness which I had observed during *The Golden Dragon* was still evident during the rehearsals of *Crave*. As in *The Golden Dragon*, Gray opted to start from scratch on the first day of rehearsals, building the ideas for the set, design and production from the rehearsal room. For the company stage manager Altan Reyman, this was quite a culture shock. He stated that '[Gray is] more of a European Director than an English one [...] we started with no prior ideas: everything is created from the rehearsal room'.[343] Often the detailed notes which Reyman had produced on a particular day were rendered useless the next as the performances completely changed. Lizzie Clachan, the designer, amassed a variety of props, costumes and ephemera which the actors were encouraged to 'play' with during the rehearsals. Often an actor would pick up a prop and use it as a starting point for his or her

[342] 'Jerwood Space' <http://www.jerwoodspace.co.uk/> [accessed 7 October 2018].
[343] Twite, 'Christine Steps Into Crave Rehearsals'.

performance. These props had no obvious thematic consistency: they included party balloons, wigs, a small child's toy, and a rabbit mask. Gray's playful, messy rehearsal room was reminiscent of Boenish's conception of Regietheater described in chapter one. Boenish describes how this unsystematic type of play can be productive:

> The playfulness of this inefficient, unprofitable 'magic' of thinking and interpreting takes away the fear of 'thinking for ourselves' , of 'interfering' or 'thinking differently'.[344]

Play allows the actors to embody ideas without having to articulate them or argue for them: it allows them to approach the dramatic text in a carnivalesque way. There was no coherent line of development in the rehearsals I watched in the first week: instead the actors continually changed their approaches, put on different layers of costume, often confusing themselves as much as the spectators who visited.

[344] Boenisch, p. 192.

Figure 8. Rona Morison and Cazimir Liske play with mirrors during a rehearsal for *Crave*, the Jerwood Space (22 March 2012), Photo by Christine Twite.

Through this seemingly chaotic methodology, Gray was able to select aspects of the playful performances to use in the final production. Whilst the actors were given free rein to experiment in whatever way they felt productive, when Gray did find a movement or idea which he liked he was quick to capture it; he made the final decision on what would be included and what would not. He cultivated a playful, somewhat avuncular persona to lead the rehearsals, in line with this carnivalesque strategy. It felt rather as if he were the head of a family, delimiting the perimeters of children-actors' play, and calling time when he felt it appropriate. Gray seemed both engaged and

irreverent at all times: relaxed, polite and charming, but also direct and assertive in his artistic decision making.

This is not to say that the rehearsal room was only benignly playful. Gray also created moments of antagonism in order to provoke reactions from the actors, introducing a sense of unease which, when it worked best, seemed to energise the actors and make them consider their approaches in different ways. Gray often put people on the spot, playing devil's advocate or bringing up difficult issues. At one point, I witnessed a conversation about the possibility of nudity in the production. On the one hand, this sparked a potentially productive debate about the potential meaning and value of nudity on stage; but it also gave rise to some and nervous talk about contractual issues. The 'mystery guests' in the room, I myself, and even the occasional member of staff or cleaner who were present, were also often asked, quite genuinely, what they thought of the proceedings: I felt at first hand the pressure and embarrassment of suddenly being required to respond, particularly in the presence of the whole cast and creative team. This sense of precarity felt stronger the more 'mystery guests' were invited into the room. ATC's mystery guest scheme continued during rehearsals for Crave and Illusions, which actor Derbhle Crotty suggested was somewhat intimidating because there were a lot of 'legends' who came to visit.[345] Richard Griffiths and Penelope Keith both visited the rehearsal room at different times, and other important theatre managers were brought in. The creative staff, not the actors, decided who would be invited into the rehearsal room.

As far as I am aware, this troubling of the sense of safety and privacy often created in the rehearsal room is still an unusual methodology. The notion of the rehearsal room an almost sacred 'safe space' where experimentation is private and protected still persists, and few directors do actually open up their rehearsals to outsiders.[346] This opening up of the rehearsal room, and the use

[345] Christine Twite, 'Notes on the Rehearsal of Crave', 2012.
[346] Rehearsal practices have only recently become a locus of academic enquiry, for example see: Harvie and Lavender; McAuley; Boenisch.

of agonistic methodologies of questioning, subverting and disagreeing recalled Mouffe's 'antagonistic democracy'; confronting difficult and unappetising questions is fundamental to the concept:

> [...] I consider that political theorists, in order to put forward a conception of a liberal-democratic society able to win the active support of its citizens, must be willing to engage with the arguments of those who have challenged the fundamental tenets of liberalism. This means confronting some disturbing questions, usually avoided by liberals and democrats alike.[347]

This confrontation produces

> [...] *tension* [... which] installs a very important dynamic, which is constitutive of the specificity of liberal democracy as a new political form of society.[348]

The tension which Mouffe sees as essential to a productive democracy is useful as a way of understanding Gray's rehearsal room and his own technique of antagonism. Gray creates tension to explore possibilities in performance; I did not witness this tension as excessive or aggressive, but controlled and balanced: a way of revealing the sometimes contradictory performance possibilities of the text. Boenisch sees this same tension as a constructive part of *regietheater*:

[347] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 36.
[348] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 44.

> [In *regietheater* the] agent of mediation and sublation as well as of a cultural partitioning and part-taking of the common sensible, is predicated on the irresolvable distance and difference, on the antagonistic tension, on the excess engendered by each text.[349]

It is regie's 'dialogic' force which gives it its power according to Boenish, where tension within a dramatic text is not suppressed but celebrated and used, and in this way Gray's rehearsal room can also be read as a dialectic space of productive 'antagonistic tension'.[350]

Tension in the rehearsal room was also produced by practical production problems, and the nature of the text of *Crave* itself. One cast member had dropped out a week before rehearsals were due to start for personal reasons, so Jack Tarlton who had performed in *The Golden Dragon* was brought in at the last minute, which was stressful for Tarlton and the three other actors, particularly because the script was so difficult. The content of the play added to this sense of unease; it deals with suicide, paedophilia and rape and there were discussions around each of the topics. There were also people present in rehearsal who had known and worked with Sarah Kane, who died by suicide not long after completing this play. Simon Kane, her brother, joined the rehearsal room for the first three days, when the team were reading and discussing the text. Simon Kane discussed the original production and shared particular details about Sarah Kane's life and ideas to contextualise aspects of *Crave*. He told us that when Sarah Kane worked on the first production, told the actors what every single line meant. The insight offered by a close family member into biographical details about the author cast a reverential hue over the proceedings. After Simon Kane had left, the actors continually discussed what 'Sarah meant'.[351] Actor Derbhle Crotty said that she spent time looking up Sarah Kane on the internet, and that she was touched that in all the photos she was smiling. She

[349] Boenisch, p. 192.
[350] Boenisch, p. 192.
[351] Twite, 'Notes on the Rehearsal of Crave'.

said that she felt she needed to 'do justice to the play for Sarah'.[352] At times it felt as if the rehearsal process was a kind of séance in which Kane's spirit was being summoned: at one point, Cazimir Liske preceded a statement about the text by saying '[t]his is what I am getting from Sarah'.[353] Gray suggested to the actors that in rehearsals they were '[t]herapising Sarah and ourselves in the process'.[354]

Such respect for authorship and this sense of authorial presence seemed to contradict the way in which Gray and the actors continually changed how they performed each section of the play. The desire to understand Sarah Kane seemed to be a reaction to the play's lack of a coherent narrative or structure: the actors seemed to be compelled to create a coherent psychological profile of Kane, as they were unable to do so for the characters in the text. Tarlton confessed to me during a coffee break that he felt that every time he spoke a line he was trying to bend the words to create a clear meaning. He felt compelled to create character, whilst being simultaneously conscious that there was no coherent character to be found, so this was a fruitless mission. This craving for cohesion of identity ironically parallels the craving which I will discuss as depicted in the text and its production – impossible, futile, yet overpowering.

When Tarlton spoke the line 'My hollow heart is full of darkness' he first did so in impassioned and poetic style: Gray immediately told him to say this line conversationally, simply.[355] Tarlton was constructing too coherent a voice, one that suggested the line was heavy with a meaning he fully understood; Gray wanted him to pull back. Gray described the different voices in the text as being 'plaited' together, and explained that his work in the rehearsal room was creating connections between the voices. As in Nancy's critique of community, structure for Gray was built by creating interconnectivity and relationalty rather than a building of a coherent, unified whole. He remarked at one point that '[w]hen things are too illustrative I don't like it; illustration is death;

[352] Twite, 'Notes on the Rehearsal of Crave'.
[353] Twite, 'Notes on the Rehearsal of Crave'.
[354] Twite, 'Notes on the Rehearsal of Crave'.
[355] Kane, p. 174.

Illustration is wrong'.[356] The rehearsal process for *Crave* uncannily mirrored the issues raised in the finally production of *Crave* and *Illusions*: the desire for unity and to fully know an Other, but the important understanding that this kind of intersubjectivity is impossible.

Intimacy and Community

Crave and *Illusions* deal with stories of the intimate: the marriages of two couples, the craving for someone to love. ATC's productions were constructed to emphasise that these intimate relationships between self and Other are intrinsically linked to the way in which we relate to each other in a community or public setting. The provocative configuration of stage and auditorium, the most unusual feature of this double bill, conveys this idea physically through the bodies of the audience. As we have seen, during the interval, the audience were asked to sit on a fully lit seating area on the stage itself to watch *Illusions*, after sitting in the darkened, anonymous auditorium for *Crave*. This movement of the audience from a private to a public space is key to my analysis of this double bill. The effect was to remind the audience that behaviour and reactions to Others are not dependent on one person, but are contingent and contextual. The pairing echoes the interval change in Sarah Kane's earlier play *Blasted*, which moves from a first half set in an intimate hotel room involving a rape of a vulnerable person, to a second half which literally blasts the setting open to reveal war and destruction outside. I read this transformation in *Blasted* as a suggestion that private transgressions are directly related to the larger public realm: in this instance the bigotry of the protagonist, who goes on to rape, is a stepping stone to the gruesome acts of a community at war. During *Illusions*, the audience's reactions to the performance could be seen by everyone in the room, and the open lighting and attitude of the actors (who spoke directly to the audience) created a sense of community or relationality between everyone there. The audience were encouraged to

[356] Twite, 'Notes on the Rehearsal of Crave'.

be self-consciously critical about how their reactions were partially constructed by social context, and about the ease with which seemingly natural responses can be the result of manipulation from others (notably the characters, whose words are gradually shown to be misleading).

ATC's *Crave* essentially lulled the audience members into a false sense of safety. Their reactions to the piece were private: they could not be immediately seen by others as they were sitting in darkness. ATC's production of *Illusions*, and the audience's transference to a well-lit area to watch it, forced the audience to witness themselves react to what was happening on stage. As the play progresses, it becomes more obvious that the actor/narrators may be manipulating the story itself: reacting to the story is thus no longer intuitive but becomes self-conscious and self-scrutinised. During the performance the possibility of a unified reaction from the audience, the comfortable unison of laughter for example, became less and less possible as spectators seemingly began to fear they might react inappropriately. Each audience member had to decide what was a joke, what was an invention, what was real tragedy, and how to react accordingly.[357] Gray was creating a situation in which the audience were made conscious of how emotion can be manipulated. They were unable to simply react; they were made conscious of the decisions they were taking as to how to react. An initial possible sense of a community of actors and audience created by shared lighting was gradually fragmented as the performance proceeded.

As we have seen, meaning is not straightforward in *Illusions*: lines of dialogue that at first seem straightforward are later revealed to be misleading or false. The coherence and cosiness of a communal response to the dramatic action is problematised and the audience is forced to become conscious of the constructed nature of performance and storytelling. Gray was again arguing that meaning is always contingent, understanding never complete, but an acceptance of this and its

[357]Like *The Golden Dragon*, *Illusions* was purposely produced to not conform to a simple genre, further complicating how the audience might respond. Genre has been described by Rachel Fensham as a structured system which frames how the audience might respond to what they watch. See: Rachel Fensham, *To Watch Theatre: Essays on Genre and Corporeality* (Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2009).

associated need for cautious listening, constant debate and the impossibility of a complete resolution is a useful model for contemporary society, just as Sennett, Nancy and Mouffe argue.

Romantic Love

The drive for similarity, sameness, and being together is echoed in the productions' presentation of romantic love. Romantic love is a syndoche here for how people approach wider, communal relationships: a 'true' love of complete exchange and understanding with the other is rejected as impossibility by the pairing of *Crave* and *Illusions*; instead the starting point for better relationships relies on the understanding that this state is unobtainable, and that understanding must be based on constant dialogic exchange. Both plays portray a desire for romanticised, 'true', love, a love which is achieved only through a mirroring of understanding in the lovers, and an associated melding of identities. This recalls Aristophanes' famous tale of two selves looking for their literal other halves in Plato's *Symposium*.[358] Both plays portray this craving for unification in love as an unobtainable cipher, despite the fact that, in *Crave* in particular, this drive for unity is depicted as understandable and compelling. The alienation which haunted the characters of *The Golden Dragon* finds a different expression here. The alienation of the characters (if one can define the voices in *Crave* as characters at all) is in spite of their craving for intimate exchange with another, rather than as in *The Golden Dragon*, where most of the characters do not seem to notice their disassociated existences. The craving for Platonic love is also portrayed as narcissistic: the exchange craved is in order to validate and complete the self; it rejects anyone who is radically different from the self. Like Narcissus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the characters in both *Crave* and *Illusions* are desperately trying to fulfil a love which is imaginary and a mirror of their own selves, something tragically

[358] Plato.

unobtainable.[359] This craving means that the characters in *Illusions* undermine any chance of meaningful exchange with their partners. In trying to fall in love with another they only see themselves.

The Golden Dragon in performance encouraged the audience to think about their own relationships with other people and other cultures, and the importance of recognizing and attending to the Other, despite cultural differences or the impossibility of ever understanding them completely. In *Crave* and *Illusions* the audience were invited to reconsider their intimate relationships in the light of their public connections. Social relationships mirror intimate ones (as the choreography of the audience in this dual production is physically designed to physically portray). Bauman usefully describes the longing for security in community in a way reminiscent of the desire for true love:

> People who dream of community in the hope of finding a long-term security which they miss so painfully in their daily pursuits, and of liberating themselves from the irksome burden of ever new and always risky choices, will be sorely disappointed.[360]

Nancy makes this parallel explicit when he dedicates a chapter in *The Inoperative Community* to the investigation of 'shattered love'.[361] Here he suggests that 'love is the extreme movement, beyond the self, of a being reaching completion'.[362] Those in love, in Nancy's view, are also shattered because unity is unobtainable - the one who loves is always reaching but never attaining the thing reached for. He writes:

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[359] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. by E. J. Kenney, trans. by A. D. Melville, Reissue edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[360] Bauman, *Community*, p. 14.
[361] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*.
[362] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 86.

> The heart is not broken, in the sense that it does not exist before the break. But it is the break itself that makes the heart. The heart is not an organ, and neither is it a faculty. It is: that I is broken and traversed by the other where its presence is most intimate and its life most open. The beating of the heart – rhythm of the partition of being, syncope of the sharing of singularity – cuts across presence, life, consciousness. That is why thinking – which is nothing other than the weighing or testing of the limits, the ends, of presence, of life, of consciousness – thinking itself is love.[363]

Here he posits the breaking of the heart as constitutive of human relations and of thought itself. Love for Nancy is an unending process rather than an achievable object. He describes it as a 'sharing of singularity' rather than a merging of subjects. The productively shattered nature of the person in love is explicitly connected to the notion of the self's relationship to community by Nancy.[364]

At the double bill's close, the acceptance of the inevitable impossibility of fusing completely with another person, and completely understand them, is a starting point for the characters in both plays to move forward. This is reflected in the physical positioning of the audience: their own manipulated position of not knowing how to respond to *Illusions* is posited as the start of more meaningful relationships (both public and private), based on consciousness of the difficulty of exchange.

Platonic love (*pace* Aristophanes) in *Crave* and *Illusions*

[363] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 99.
[364] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 84.

The relationship which most defines *Crave* and *Illusions*, and is the most obvious link between them, is that of romantic love.[365] Both plays portray characters or voices who describe romantic love in terms which come from the romantic tradition arguably founded on Aristophanes' fable of the creation of love in *The Symposium*.[366] He describes how the first beings on earth had two faces, four arms and four legs. But they attacked the gods, and in punishment Zeus split these beings in half, creating human beings. Humans are now fated to spend their lives looking for their literal other halves, to regain the wholeness lost in the fragmentation from the other. The pursuit of the whole is called love, the ancient need to melt into one another: in Aristophanes story, in death the lover's souls shall be one.[367] As Frisbee Sheffield has it,

> [here] human beings are needy creatures who strive towards a state of self-realisation and happiness. Love aims at the completion of self, and lovers seek someone akin to themselves who can make them complete and whole.[368]

In both *Crave* and *Illusions* the love described bears strong parallels to this concept of Aristophanes': love completes the self and makes it whole; without it the self is incomplete and fragmented. To understand oneself, one needs to be loved and without love self-realisation is impossible and life is meaningless. The perpetual state of being is to be consumed with a craving desire to find your other half. Sheffield also notes above that the lover seeks someone 'akin to themselves' to complete the self. The craving love described by Aristophanes is in this way is less productively processual than Nancy's shattering love: it is narcissistic, self-interested, as it is for themselves and not the other that

[365] Although *Crave* in particular acknowledges the fact that this love has parallels in other types of love: motherly, brotherly, familial, and the love of friendship.
[366] Plato.
[367] Plato, pp. 23–26.
[368] Plato, p. xii.

the lover desires completion. The Other becomes an extension of the self, love annihilates the Other and absorbs it entirely.

In *Illusions* the two male characters are consumed with the question of whether the relationships they have are examples of 'true' or 'real' love.[369] At the heart of this debate lies the question as to whether love can be 'true' or 'real' if it is unrequited. The play opens with Denny telling Sandra that '...true love is when two people love each other, and if only one person loves, there's no love to begin with.'[370] Two halves make a whole; without this unity there is nothing. Love here is a unification of two parts, and it is, as Albert later similarly contends 'the love described in literature' (from Plato to the present, of course), and the 'love that everyone dreams about when they're young and that nobody finds.'[371] Denny's belief in eternal love, and the necessity of reciprocity, parallels the idea of love in the *Symposium*. In the case of Albert, this belief leads him not only to reject his wife, but to argue that therefore she could never have loved him because only 'mutual love' is 'true love.'[372] Albert's literary love is also seen in his suggestion that Sandra and he 'were made for each other.'[373] This phrase is directly from Aristophanes' myth, metaphor though it may be. Denny also specifically invokes the idea of meaning in his love for Sandra, explaining that '[t]hanks to her presence, I believe that the world is not without meaning...', which Albert agrees is an example of true love.[374] As in Aristophanes, without true love the world is meaning*less*; love becomes the key which unlocks understanding of the world as well as the other. A belief in this literary narrative of love is what causes tragedy in *Illusions*: Margaret is cruelly spurned as a wife and forced to lie; she eventually kills herself because she is confronted with the world's meaninglessness without Albert's love. Sandra is told on her death bed that the relationship with her husband was a lie.

[369] Viripaev, pp. 17–18.
[370] Viripaev, p. 9.
[371] Viripaev, p. 14.
[372] Viripaev, p. 19.
[373] Viripaev, p. 19.
[374] Viripaev, p. 27.

Figure 9. The cast of *Illusions*, North Wall Arts Centre (dir. Ramin Gray, 2012), Photo by Nina Sologubenko.

In *Illusions* the male characters are portrayed as tragically unaware of the impossibility of the love they describe, despite Albert's knowledge that his understanding of it is taken from literature and not life. In his programme notes for ATC's production of *Crave*, Mark Ravenhill (to whom the original play was dedicated) remarks that

> ...the play is almost embarrassingly romantic ... She had a huge faith in the power of transcendental romantic love ... we only see this romantic love in bad fiction and crap movies but for Sarah it was a very real thing ...the play demands that we drop our post-modern guard ...[375]

[375] Mark Ravenhill and ATC, 'Programme for ATC's Crave', 2012, p. n.p., Victoria and Albert Museum Archives.

Ravenhill is partly right in his analysis here, in that 'true', romantic love is represented in *Crave*. As he suggests, there is a self-consciousness created by the text that this love has a literary (and cinematic) basis, and is therefore an empty construct. However, rather than dropping our post-modern guard, ATC's pairing of plays suggests that to guard against the notion of a reified, idealised love, with its illusory projection of unity between two people, might be at least rational: in both plays this kind of love is a drive for transcendence which is ends in tragedy. In *Illusions* this is obviously so; in *Crave* the very title suggests the deep longing for transcendence, but in the play and its performance there is a self-consciousness that this drive will end in inevitable failure: a desire for Aristophanean love despite the understanding that it is unobtainable. This is one reason for the desperation of the voices within the text.

This kind of desperate love is most commonly seen in the lines given to A, in particular in A's soliloquy. This soliloquy is a speech of two pages in a play in which the other voices usually speak one or two lines each. In performance, this is particularly notable, as it abruptly changes the rhythmic pace of the dialogue. In ATC's production, this was further emphasised by the fact that M, C and B gradually turned away from A as he gave his soliloquy, the only time they seemed to physically react to each other on stage. A's speech has all the marks of the Aristophanean model: his self is created by being with the other and the love he feels is inexpressible in its vigour and has the imagined power to defeat even death:

> A [... I] think I'm losing myself but know I'm safe with you [...I want to] somehow communicate some of the/ overwhelming undying overpowering unconditional all-

encompassing heart-enriching mind-expanding on-going never-ending love I have for you ... what will I do when you throw me away?[376]

The text is full of similar examples. There is the desperate seeking of the other:

M I looked for you all over the city.[377]

The desire to merge with the other, a validation of self through union with the other:

M You stop thinking of yourself as I, you think of we.[378]

B ...I was, okay, two people, right?[379]

B Now I have found you I can stop looking for myself.[380]

A Can't get you out of my system.[381]

B If you died it would be like my bones had been removed. No one would know why, but I would collapse.[382]

[376] Kane, pp. 170–71.
[377] Kane, p. 156.
[378] Kane, p. 161.
[379] Kane, p. 163.
[380] Kane, p. 178.
[381] Kane, p. 173.
[382] Kane, p. 192.

And the lines which suggest the impossibility of this kind of love:

C You've fallen in love with someone who doesn't exist.[383]

A A Japanese man in love with his virtual reality girlfriend.[384]

At the end of A's soliloquy, the text states that C begins to repeatedly chant '[t]his has to stop' over A's words of love: the voice rejecting and rationalising this idealised form of romantic love is written *within* the text.[385]

Ravenhill suggests that *Crave* is a text devoid of post-modern irony. I argue, however, that the play's romanticism is undermined by a consciousness of its falseness. Sarah Kane has been recorded in several interviews discussing her interest in the Barthes' text *A Lover's Discourse* in relation to her play *Cleansed*.[386] What has not been considered is its importance for an understanding of *Crave*. *Cleansed* was first staged in April 1998, only few months before *Crave*'s premier in August 1998, which suggests that Kane's research on Barthes would have been still fresh in her mind.[387] In *A Lover's Discourse* Barthes argues that the way love is described by the lover is not essential or natural, but created from a set of recognisable images or figures which structure their thoughts. Barthes lists a number of different examples of these figures; the book itself is an image-repertoire or thesaurus. Each figure is described, and examples of it from literature, philosophy, history, psychoanalysis and even Barthes' friends demonstrate the way the figure has

[383] Kane, p. 158.
[384] Kane, p. 165.
[385] Kane, p. 170.
[386] Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Vintage Classics, 2002).
[387] Mark Ravenhill, 'The Beauty of Brutality', *Guardian*, 28 October 2006, section Stage <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2006/oct/28/theatre.stage> [accessed 30 December 2016]; Graham Saunders, *'Love Me Or Kill Me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 93; Annabelle Singer, 'Don't Want to Be This: The Elusive Sarah Kane', *TDR: The Drama Review*, 48.2 (2004), 139–71 (p. 152).

been used. Barthes' elegant descriptions of each of the figures manage to both celebrate language whilst simultaneously exposing its constructed nature. *Crave* does the same: its textual creativity feels expansive and decadently romantic as Ravenhill suggests, yet implicit within the play is the constant rejection and refusal of coherence, or to use another Bartesian idea, *Crave* acknowledges the *mythology* of love.[388] There are other striking similarities. Like *A Lover's Discourse,* Kane borrows from a plethora of different textual sources in *Crave* (although she was adamant that these sources were not to be footnoted or explained in the text, rather different to Barthes' forensically researched annotations in *A Lover's Discourse*).[389] *Crave*'s intertextuality works in a different way to Barthes'. In performance, an audience member cannot possibly grasp and research each phrase as it emerges, instead each reference emerges from the performance at such a rate as to be registered only by the unconscious (if registered at all – many references may be unknown to the audience). Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse* is constructed around the idea of the lover alone with his (or her) thoughts; it is 'the site of someone speaking within himself, *amorously*, confronting the other (the loved object), who does not speak'.[390] ATC's staging of *Crave* is also based on amorous craving for love and desiring the other who is always absent. In an interview between Nils Talbert and Kane quoted in Sanders' book, Kane mentions that

> [t]here's a point in *A Lover's Discourse* when he says the situation of a rejected lover is not unlike the situation of a prisoner in Dachau [...] I was appalled and thought how can he possibly suggest the pain of love is as bad as that [...] [b]ut the more I thought about it I thought I actually do know what he's saying. It's about the loss of the self [...] it's actually a kind of madness.[391]

[388] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers (New York: Hill & Wang, 1973).
[389] Saunders, *'Love Me Or Kill Me'*, p. 103.
[390] Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, p. 5.
[391] Saunders, *'Love Me Or Kill Me'*, p. 93.

Kane suggests love is a kind of death, or a 'loss of self'. The image of Dachau is horrifying: one of entrapment, torture and desperation. It certainly has none of Nancy's implication that the shattering experience of love might in any way be positive. Again, Kane is accentuating the way love is more connected to the idea of the self than the Other. The Other remains obfuscated, unknowable, but unlike in Nancy's lively, processual figuration of love as the 'rhythm of the partition of being, syncope of the sharing of singularity [which] cuts across presence, life, consciousness', the lover in Crave cannot seem productively to acknowledge the unknowability of the other.[392]

Finding meaning in *Crave* and *Illusions*

I now turn to consider Barthes' concept of the writerly text, and the way in which the reader is invited to create meanings from it, as another useful structure for understanding the text and performance of Crave. It seems that *Crave* is not only deeply indebted to Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse*, but also to his conception of a writerly text.[393] Barthes' writerly text is one that is self-consciously literary – and whose meaning is not plain. Readerly texts are constructed to be as clear as possible in their meaning. Writerly ones acknowledge the contingency of meaning in text and actively celebrate this. The reader is provoked or forced to construct their own meaning from the text, as an obvious single interpretation is not clear. This search for meaning is explicitly connected to a desire for love, as Smith succinctly argues: '[l]anguage [for Barthes]... can then be seen as a desirous exchange motivated by an absence which is never obtained – only sought through endlessly deferred signs'.[394] In *Crave* and *Illusions* the search for love is the search for meaning – as Denny says of Sandra, explaining that '[t]hanks to her presence, I believe that the world is not without

[392] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 99.
[393] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975).
[394] Christopher B. Smith, 'Absence, Desire, and Love in John Donne and Roland Barthes', *CONCEPT*, 26 (2002), n.p. (p. n.p.).

meaning...'.[395] In ATC's pairing of *Crave* with *Illusions*, the audience are forced in both to construct their own narratives during the performance – in *Crave*, due to the fragmentation of text (audience members must put text together to form narrative), in *Illusions* because of the play's increasingly untrustworthy narrators.

In studies of Kane much has been written about the fragmented style of *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis.* Saunders explains that *Crave* is 'a demanding play, and one that constantly eludes a definitive interpretation'.[396] This analysis however does not specifically mention the people to whom the play is most demanding - the theatre audience - and in studies of Kane in general, analyses of how the theatre audience might experience watching the plays is interestingly absent. Other contemporary critics have linked Kane's writerly style to Lehmann's conception of a post-dramatic theatre: as Barnett suggests 'a postdramatic production of ... Kane turns the texts into objects in their own right, as constellations of language, devoid of individuated perspective', but there is no mention by critics of the specific lot of the audience watching these plays.[397] A thorough analysis of the reception of *Crave* is outside the bounds of this thesis, however I do want to highlight here that the audience are at the centre of *Crave* in performance and, in watching ATC's production many times, I was struck by the diversity of audience reaction to the piece: rapt attention, dismissive tutting, boredom, sleepiness and confusion.

Crave in performance was frustrating to watch, I felt that it purposefully obfuscated meaning. As mentioned before, the play contains a range of intertextual borrowings which, to my ear, sound familiar when spoken but are not obviously marked. The play and its performance self-consciously refer to the constructed nature of the text itself:

[395] Viripaev, p. 27.
[396] Saunders, *'Love Me Or Kill Me'*, p. 103.
[397] David Barnett, 'When Is a Play Not a Drama? Two Examples of Postdramatic Theatre Texts', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 24.1 (2008), 14–23; Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. by Karen Jürs-Munby (London: Routledge, 2006).

A And don't forget that poetry is language for its own sake. Don't forget when different words are sanctioned, other attitudes required.[398]

This fragment comes near the end of the play, and suggests that the search for meaning which the audience have gone through has been meaningless: language is just language. Just as the characters in *Illusions* are confronted with a lack of meaning in the universe, so the audience of *Crave* are subtly mocked for trying to create coherence. In an eerie foreshadowing of *Illusions*, the fragment also suggests that sanctioned words require specific attitudes and responses. As we have seen, in *Illusions* the audience is confronted by the complexity of how to react when the words of the performers are gradually revealed.

The voices in *Crave*, as previously suggested, are consumed with a craving for love, and the longed for meaning and coherence which is expected to accompany it. Again, I want to link this desire with the writerly text and its demand that the audience find or uncover meaning. The figures in *Crave* are looking for meaning, in this case through a coherent version of love. As A says, 'I keep trying to understand but I don't.'[399] C asks 'What's anything got to do with anything?'.[400] These questions are the very same that the audience are invited to ask when watching the performance.

Just as the impossibility of achieving an Aristophanean love exchange with a partner, wherein your thoughts become one, is critiqued in *Crave*, language itself is held up to the same appraisal: language, one of the most important elements of social exchange, can never create complete and total understanding between people. The critique of love is interconnected with the critique of language and the contingency of meaning in language is further explored by the use of foreign language and translation. *Crave* includes segments in Spanish, Serbo-Croatian and German:

[398] Kane, p. 199.
[399] Kane, p. 171.
[400] Kane, p. 163.

the Spanish and German a British audience might have some familiarity with, but Serbo-Croatian is very unlikely to be recognised by a British audience.[401] At one point in performance A narrates:

> A An American woman translated a novel from Spanish into English. She asked her Spanish classmate his opinion of her work. The translation was very bad. He said that he would help her and she offered to pay him for his time. He refused. She offered to take him out to dinner. This was acceptable to him so he agreed. But she forgot. The Spaniard is still waiting for his dinner.[402]

This narrative is fascinating because it reinforces the connection between an intimate exchange and an exchange of language. The American woman's inability to translate Spanish very well is repeated in her inability to recognise the Spaniard's (possibly) romantic overtures. Translation from one language to another can never be a direct copy of the original, meaning is never identical. Similarly in *Crave* there is no possibility of total understanding of the intentions of the writer, just as there is no possibility of a total understanding of the other/lover.

The story about the Spaniard is followed by B saying the words 'El dinero viene solo' – meaning 'money comes alone'.[403] The Spaniard presumably receives money rather than a chance of a relationship from the woman. However, the sound of these words in performance could easily be misinterpreted by an English speaking audience, as the word 'dinero' seems to echo the word 'dinner' at the end of A's story. To one who does not understand Spanish, B's words could create the image of the man sitting alone at dinner. This is not a misreading, but something which the text deliberately suggest. Characters in *Crave* hold the mystical belief that despite everything messages

[401] Kane, pp. 160, 167, 172, 176, 179, 194, 196.
[402] Kane, p. 160.
[403] Kane, pp. 160, 201.

can still move between people. M recounts a memory of catching her (or his) grandmother kissing his grandfather – and her/his mother's response that this was actually her own memory, an event which happened when she was pregnant with M.[404] C then states 'We pass these messages'.[405] There is a suggestion here of a mystical connection between the family members. This is echoed later in the play when B states that his (or her) nose is broken, just like his/her father's:

> B ...Genetically impossible, but there it is. We pass these messages faster than we think and in ways we don't think possible.[406]

The craving for meaning, interconnection and understanding is reflected again in these instances where there is a belief, or a hope, of something beyond language, some metaphysical connection that will make events meaningful. In linguistic terms, this is the search for Derrida's elusive transcendental signifier, a meaning which transcends all others and which allows everything else to be defined and fixed.[407]

In *Illusions* the search for transcendental meaning is encapsulated by the story of Denny and the stone. Backpacking in Australia, Denny comes across a stone. He feels

> [...] a special affinity for [the] stone. It seemed to him that between him and the stone there existed a kind of special connection [...] Everyone must have his own place in the

[404] Kane, p. 159.
[405] Kane, p. 159.
[406] Kane, p. 162.
[407] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 69.

> world. The tree grows in its place [... e]ach human being, too, must find his own place in the world.[408]

The shifting universe is stilled for Denny by his connection with the stone, and through it his position in the world. It both confirms his own identity and fixes his position within it. Sandra, meanwhile, bursts into tears as she believes that she cannot find a similarly fixed place: she is rootless and terrified. Denny is overcome by a metaphysical belief in the stone which quells his worries about his own existence. Like *Crave*, *Illusions* demonstrates the passionate human desire to be part of a whole and in Denny's case this takes on literal terms in his relationship with the stone. The desire to find a single meaning in the universe, something to make yourself make sense, is therefore not only seen as tragic or unobtainable in these productions: importantly, like for Bauman, this desire or craving is understandable in this post-modern world, something the play suggests the audience might understand and empathise with.

One little examined feature of *Crave* is the way Kane actively plays with a desire for meaning in the audience / reader / critic: the performance gulls the audience into trying to piece together meaning; it plays with the audience. In the same way, Kane also leaves tantalising clues about herself in the text. Studies of Kane have disavowed reading her texts for clues about Kane's life: almost every publication after her death has argued this is unproductive.[409] However even those who have eschewed autobiography seem drawn back into discussions about Kane's personal life: Saunders, during the University of Lincoln's 2012 symposium on Kane, talked at length about the importance of Sarah Kane's own archives, which have been embargoed for at least another twenty years. This is understandable given how her plays, and in particular *Crave*, consciously play with

[408] Viripaev, p. 35.
[409] De Vos and Saunders; Saunders, *'Love Me Or Kill Me'*; Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*.

meaning in the ways I have described.[410] The writing is purposively provocative, to hint at the possibility of personal disclosure without fully allowing the audience in. Kane writes herself into the text:

A But God has blessed me with the mark of Cain.[411]

The mark of Cain/Kane can of course be literally translated as her own writing, but the biblical allusion to Cain is significant. Cain killed his brother, and was punished by God with his mark, but rather than a blessing this was meant as a curse. A plethora of possible meanings could be considered, but significant here is the way Kane actively induces the audience/reader to puzzle over a possible connection with her private self. This is indeed the 'private iconography which I cannot decipher' as described by M earlier.[412] Sarah Kane enacts a textual haunting of *Crave*. The very first lines begin with a literal haunting:

B My will reads, Fuck this up and I'll haunt you for the rest of your fucking life.[413]

As I have described, Kane's brother Simon was invited into the ATC rehearsal room in order to explain, from his perspective, what various elements of the text meant to Sarah. This gave the actors the sense of intimate knowledge they could use to inform their performances. They knew something which the audience did not. Later in the performance C says '...I hate these words that

[410] Common discourse on mental illness or mental disturbance echoes this language, for example in the call for someone to 'pull themselves together', or that a mentally ill person is 'broken'. Sarah Kane herself was being treated for depression and mental illness throughout the time she wrote *Crave*.
[411] Kane, p. 195.
[412] Kane, p. 183.
[413] Kane, p. 155.

won't let me die'.[414] Whilst celebrating and validating Barthesian philosophy, Kane simultaneously hints at the undeath of the author within the text itself, playing with the possibility that her secrets could somehow be revealed if one searches hard enough.[415] It is unsurprising, then, that Sarah Kane first presented the text of *Crave* to the theatre company Paine's Plough under the name of Marie Kelvedon, with a playful biography that included a tale of her being sent down from Oxford for an unspeakable act of Dadaism, and referenced a pet cat named Grotowski).[416] This pseudonym was created to prevent the first readers of the play from considering it in the light of Kane's earlier (and very different) work. But Kane manages to playfully hint about her identity within the text, as if enjoying the process of reinvention. As C says, there is '[s]omeone who died who is not dead' within the text and its performance; 'I keep coming back'.[417]

As I have suggested, there are other numerous intertextual references in *Crave* - most memorably the German phrase by B 'In den Bergen, da fühlst du dich frei', meaning 'in the mountains, there you feel free' which is a line from Eliot's *The Wasteland*.[418] Kane herself argued that the printed text should not display any notes to reference or decipher the quotations, so the reader is denied an explication of meaning just as the audience are - unless they are particularly well versed in all these references and able to place them on hearing. The way Kane names the voices in the text also courts discussion of meaning. Kane claimed in later interviews that the letters, listed as C, M, B, A, could be given any meaning, however the strange ordering and letters chosen – rather than a simple A, B, C and D in the style of Pinter – is surely a provocation to the reader or audience member.[419] Here again Kane encourages a sense of existential disparity between the craving for understanding and the inability to understand.

[414] Saunders, *'Love Me Or Kill Me'*, p. 184.
[415] Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text: Essays* (London: Fontana, 1977).
[416] Saunders, *'Love Me Or Kill Me'*, p. 102.
[417] Kane, p. 157.
[418] Kane, p. 196.
[419] Saunders, *'Love Me Or Kill Me'*, p. 104.

ATC's production design further enhanced this discomfort. As previously suggested, the actor's positioning and their costumes suggested their narratives were waking dreams, meaning that their strange and impenetrable lines could be read as a psychoanalyst might read a dream.[420] Spectators and critics alike were invited to begin a task which can never be completed, just as the voices in *Crave* seek an intimate exchange with an Other who will never be found. But, as M clearly states '[a]nd if this makes no sense then you understand perfectly.'[421] Accepting the shifting possible meanings and impossibility of complete understanding is key to how Gray and ATC wanted their production of *Crave* to be received. The production both created the tantalising possibility that it may have some transcendental final meaning whilst reminding the audience that this is unobtainable.

Crave and _Illusions_ in the Mirror

> M Sometimes the shape of my head alarms me. When I catch sight of it reflected in a darkened train window, the landscape passing through the image of my head. Not that this is anything unusual or ... alarming ... about the shape of my head, but it does ... alarm me.[422]

Gray had already used the idea of the mirror as a metaphor for theatre in *The Golden Dragon* (see above). However, in *Crave* and *Illusions* the metaphor is literalised by having mirrors on stage. The two plays also mirror each other: the audience are asked to move places in the interval to sit in the mirrored opposite to where they were before. During *Crave*, the actors and audience

[420] Freud.
[421] Kane, p. 159.
[422] Kane, p. 160.

also mirrored each other, the actors staring forward, conscious of those around them - but their responses were not visible in the darkness. In *Illusions* the actors interact with each other and the audience and the playing space is lit so that the audience and actors all sit in the same pool of light, and therefore can speak to and at each other. The two plays mirror each other in their philosophising on love and meaning in different ways.

During the run of *The Golden Dragon*, Gray referred to the production as a 'hall of mirrors' which the audience have to navigate.[423] The above passage from *Crave* parallels a similar process: the speaker sees his/her image in the reflection, and although aware that the reflection is of him/herself, feels strangely alienated by the image. The moment recalls catching sight of one's image as a reflection, and momentarily being struck by its objecthood, its otherness, its alienation from your sense of self: it is both oneself and not oneself. The voice in *Crave* sees the landscape infringing on the body, the unfamiliar circumference of the head: the body is simply another of the surrounding objects. The reflection of the head is uncanny (unheimlich) in the Freudian sense: something disorientating and unhomely in a homely environment.[424]

Conclusion

I have argued that ATC's productions of *Crave* and *Illusions* encouraged the audience to consider communication between the self and Other. In the productions' poststructuralist deconstruction of linguistic communication, and their dissection of idealistic Arisopheanean love, they offered a clear argument about the impossibility of complete, interrelational understanding between people. The pairing of performances was structured to provoke the audience to consider their own reactions to and understandings of what they see and hear on stage. This is not to say,

[423] Schimmelpfennig, *The Golden Dragon*, p. Director's Note.
[424] Freud.

however, that the productions were simply an act of deconstruction. Gray's two productions argue something further: that being self-conscious about the difficulties of communication between self and the other is a positive step towards better relationships, both personal and public – and these are not separate fields in this analysis, or in this pairing of plays. Gray is arguing for a dialogic community structure similar to Sennett's, rejecting the complete synthesis of differing opinions.[425] Gray's theatre and Sennett's work suggest the impossibility of complete exchange and understanding, and instead focuses on the work of continuing dialogues between people and groups. This is an ongoing, unending stream which is hard work but potentially the most productive way of dealing with the complexity and mutability of contemporary cosmopolitan communities – this relationality is also seen as productive by Nancy, in his description of processual, shattering love, and by Blanchot and Bauman, as I noted in Chapter One. The productions of the *Crave* and *Illusions* being shown in tandem, and the movement of the audience from auditorium to stage, is crucial to this argument. Theatre itself, its relationship between the actors and the audience, is about communication between stage and audience. This relationship is fundamental to the way in which Gray presents and plays within his meditations on community.

In my discussion of *Illusions*, I have focussed primarily on the male characters and their belief in love. In conclusion, I want to look at the female characters, and suggest that their instinctual understanding of the impossibility of the true love ideals of the men serves as an expression of the processes needed to produce the dialogical community.

It is only in the episode where Albert smokes marijuana for the first time that he is able to understand the world as 'soft' and that 'in our regular state of mind, we don't notice this, and we live in a solid world'.[426] As we have seen, as Sandra dies, she says to Albert of her unrequited love for him:

[425] Sennett.
[426] Viripaev, p. 31. Interestingly, both here and in *The Golden Dragon* the female characters all have a better intuitive understanding of relationships between people that the male characters. In *The Golden Dragon* the

> Thanks to my love for you, I learned what it means to wish for nothing for yourself, but only to give. My love for you taught me that giving is much more important than demanding something for yourself […][427]

Sandra focuses on the generosity and altruism of her love. She understands that Albert does not feel the same way, but she appreciates him despite his inability to mirror her own emotions. Margaret later says to Albert that '[y]ou shouldn't make judgements about others based on yourself'.[428] She understands explicitly the danger of using personal experience to judge how others might be feeling. Relationships are based on knowledge of the difference between people rather than blind belief in replication or complete exchange. Tellingly, Margaret lies to Albert when she says that she 'feel[s] precisely the same way' as him – that she too loves another.[429] She has already warned of the dangers of believing that another person can reproduce your feelings completely.

Sandra does not understand Denny's story of his vision of a flying saucer as a child, which he describes as 'something exalted, something divine'. Denny tells her because 'he loved her'.[430] But Sandra cannot mirror his respect for this memory, thinking simply that 'this is no place for aliens'.[431] Sandra narrates as follows:

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white male characters are all sexually aggressive while the air hostess depicts the healing desire for interconnectivity at the end, whilst in *Illusions* the men have unrealistic ideals of love whereas the women are able to articulate a better understanding of interconnection. This trend could be accused of depicting antiquated notions of the hardened male and the emotional female, but Gray undercuts this in the complexity of the female vicar in *The Events*.

[427] Viripaev, pp. 12–13.
[428] Viripaev, p. 16.
[429] Viripaev, p. 19.
[430] Viripaev, p. 21.
[431] Viripaev, p. 25.

> And there, at that very moment, Sandra realised that life is composed of these tiny, multicoloured fragments. That life holds nothing whole, just these paltry, tattered pieces, that there's no single plot, just a multitude of episodes, that there's nothing central, just trivialities and details. And that all these details can't seem to converge into something complete, into something consummate. It's probably impossible to explain all this with words, but Sandra suddenly felt that the world she live in was missing something complete, something unified, some one thing that could connect all of this.[432]

Here Sandra cannot connect to the cosmic relevance of Denny's story, and she articulates all the implicit desires that *Crave* and *Illusions* explore in their stories and in the manipulation of its audience. She could be talking about *Crave* or the text of *Illusions* as having 'no single plot' just a 'multitude of episodes', in a metatheatrical nod to the difficulty the audience may feel in constructing meaning from the performances they are watching. The desire for all to 'converge' or 'complete' into something 'unified' again recalls the Aristophean love myth and the search for the transcendental signifier. She also talks about desiring something 'central', an image recalled in *Crave* as B narrates:

> A circle is the only geometric shape defined by its centre. No chicken and egg about it, the centre came first, the circumference follows. The earth, by definition, has a centre. And only the fool that knows it can go wherever he pleases, knowing the centre will hold him down, stop him flying out of orbit. But when your sense of centre shifts, comes whizzing to the surface, the balance has gone. The balance has gone. The balance my baby has gone.[433]

[432] Viripaev, p. 25.
[433] Kane, pp. 192–93.

The idea of being balanced by gravity is twisted here into a metaphor about feeling unified and centered. A sense of centre gives you the gravity to pull yourself together around it, to balance. Sandra's sense of fragmentation is articulated in terms of a 'world' with something 'missing' - just as the world's centre shifts in this passage from *Crave*.[434] The self is a broken one; it has no boundaries, like the desiring halves in Aristophanes' myth.

It is one of the final images in *Illusions* which most memorably replays the ideas that haunt both plays: acknowledging the difficulties of mutual understanding, accepting fragmentation, is the first step towards building more meaningful relationships in the world. This comes just after the episode of Denny and the round stone. Sandra's despair at the shifting universe is recalled when Denny finds the stone, which he feels is his 'place in the world'.[435] As we have seen, the stone reinforces his sense of self and relationship with everything around him. Sandra senses this, and at first despairs that she could not 'find her place'.[436] But finally, she spots a pink line on the horizon and it is this image which she is drawn to and which calms her:

> Look Denny, said Sandra, do you see that pink line on the horizon? Do you think that's the refracted rays of the setting sun, or the reflection of something pink from the surface of the hills? [...] every person ought to have something they can look at in a moment of despair and calm themselves. And that pink line on the horizon might be just that sort of thing. [...] It's the sunset.[437]

The pink line is the rays of the setting sun – it is always moving, impossible to catch up with. Instead of gaining a sense of balance from the earth, or its gravity, Sandra recognises the beauty of the

[434] Viripaev, p. 25.
[435] Viripaev, p. 35.
[436] Viripaev, p. 36.
[437] Viripaev, pp. 36–37.

changing light as something that causes her to feel 'fine': it is not an overwhelming or exultory feeling, but a calming sense of understanding which is achieved.[438] This image is uncannily echoed towards the end of *Crave:*

A A pale gold sea under a pale pink sky.

[...]

B Clouds converge as I see I am on a globe. [439]

As the audience left the stage at the end of *Illusions*, they may also have noticed that the performance area was surrounded by a pink carpeted line, subtly recalling this final image of calm.

In this chapter I have argued that the dramaturgy and narratives of *Crave* and *Illusions* are used by ATC to foreground for audience the contingency of meaning and the difficulties of fully understanding the Other. The audience first watch *Crave*, which has no coherent narrative structure, and are then seated on the stage to watch *Illusions*, which at first appears to follow a simple narrative but is gradually shown to be deceptively complex. The search for coherent unity of understanding is a central theme in both plays: the voices in *Crave* all appear to crave a meaningful encounter with another person, and the male characters in *Illusions* seek something similar in their quest for requited, and therefore 'true', love. This craving is presented as understandable in a post-modern, alienated society but is ultimately problematic, as the women in *Illusions* seem better to understand. Here I have read this drive for unified intersubjectivity as a distillation, on the level of personal relationships, of the broader critiques of community found in my other two case studies.

[438] Viripaev, p. 37.
[439] Kane, p. 197.

Next, I move to ATC's production of *The Events*, which brings personal and political tensions around community into violent dialogue.

Chapter Five: *The Events* by David Greig

Community and *The Events*

ATC's production of David Greig's *The Events* was exceptionally well received by audiences and critics alike. It toured the UK and the US during 2014, 2015 and 2016. It has been translated into German, French and Norwegian and, as mentioned in Chapter Two, Gray directed several versions of the play in different languages. Originally a co-production of Actors Touring Company, Brageteatret (Drammen), Schauspielhaus (Vienna) and the Young Vic Theatre (London), Gray directed a version in English for the UK, in German for Vienna (*Die Ereignisse*) and in Norwegian for Drammen (*Hendelsen*). All three versions were united for a performance at the Southbank Centre, which used different languages at different moments in the performance. Gray also directed a French version, collaborating with the Centre Dramatique National Nancy Lorraine, La Manufacture and Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg *Les Événements*.

In this chapter I mark that many critical reactions to the production focused on its use of a community choir on stage. In each place the production toured, local community choirs were invited to perform in *The Events*. The use of these 'real' choirs onstage, alongside the narrative of the play which recounts how one woman tries to recover after a terrorist massacre of her local community choir, meant that many of the reviewers read the production as a celebration of the power of community to overcome dissent. Instead, informed by Nancy, Agamben and Blanchot's interrogations of community outlined in Chapter One, I describe how, as previously, the dramaturgical structures of ATC's production, and the narrative itself, actually critique the idea of a community based on unified identity. I contend that *The Events* argues for the importance of

dissent, difference and the willingness to listen to the Other in contemporary community structures, as in Mouffe's 'agonistic democracy' and Sennett's dialogical method.[440]

The Events: A Synopsis

The Events was ATC's third production under the leadership of Gray, and its most successful in terms of critical response and longevity.[441] The play consists of a dialogue between two key play actors, whilst a chorus looks on, which consciously parallels the configuration of early Greek tragedy.[442] So too does its structure: the play is short, about 100 minutes in total, and conforms to the unities of a single time, place and action. It follows the story of a female Scottish community choir leader and vicar, Claire, who witnesses a gunman (named The Boy) massacre some of her choir members during one of their rehearsals. He says simply 'Everyone who belongs here, go. The rest of you are going to die.'[443] The play follows Claire as she obsessively interviews people connected to The Boy in order to try and understand his motives behind the attack. The production opens with a soliloquy by The Boy on the destructive results of Captain Cook's first contact with Australia, then the action abruptly changes to Claire welcoming The Boy to the choir, and then to Claire talking to her counsellor or psychiatrist about the massacre. The actor who plays The Boy also plays all the other people Claire comes into contact with, facilitating these sudden changes in scene. He does not change costume or appearance as he takes on these other characters, and indeed hardly ever leaves the stage. In the British version The Boy has always been played by a man from an ethnic minority, whilst in the Austrian and Norwegian versions The Boy was played by a white actor. It is often unclear to the audience who the actor playing The Boy is playing (this is how he is named in the text

[440] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*; Agamben; Blanchot; Mouffe, *Agonistics*; Sennett.
[441] Actors Touring Company, 'Actors Touring Company Official Website'.
[442] 'The Events - Q&A with Writer David Greig', *BBC Writer's Room*, 2014 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/writersroom/posts/The-Events-QA-with-writer-David-Greig> [accessed 9 July 2014].
[443] Greig, *The Events*.

throughout), as the scenes change so abruptly but the set and costumes do not, and this parallels Claire's inability to separate anyone she meets from her obsession with The Boy. Again and again the location and characterisation change at unexpected points, sometimes mid-conversation. As well as the psychiatrist, this actor also portrays Claire's girlfriend, a member of the public, The Boy's father, a far-right politician, a writer, a school acquaintance of The Boy, a police negotiator, and at several points in the play including Claire's final encounter, The Boy himself. Through these interactions we learn that Claire is highly traumatised and obsessed by the events of the massacre, and is obsessively trying to learn more about the killer in order to understand why they happened. During the play the remaining members of her choir stop attending rehearsal because of this erratic and fanatical behaviour. Even her relationship with her girlfriend breaks down under the weight of this obsession, when Claire suggests to her that she, Claire, might move to Peterhead prison (where The Boy is held) to take up a chaplaincy there. The onstage choir sing at various points, standing in for Claire's choir, but also interacting with The Boy and singing his 'favourite' song as I described in the Introduction.

The dénouement occurs when Claire finally meets The Boy face to face in prison, to talk over the events. She brings poisonous mushrooms to slip into his tea and kill him, but at the last moment changes her mind and throws the tea on the floor. For most of the play The Boy is presented as a ridiculous figure, answering 'frequently asked questions' about his interests in the manner of a celebrity blogger, and later comically enacting a Viking warrior ritual he has learnt about from a DVD.[444] When Claire visits him in prison he is depicted quite differently: he is banal, confused, and completely unaware of the magnitude of what he has done. The Boy before this encounter could be understood as Claire's projection of him, based on her imagination; The Boy Claire encounters in the prison is so strikingly different to this projection, so inarticulate and prosaic, that she changes her

[444] The publish text is different to the ATC performance and leaves out much the comedic elements of The Boy's characterisation, as these sections were rewritten after the text went to press. In particular the moment on p.45 where The Boy imagines changing into his sprit familiar was radically changed to emphasise the ridiculous connections between The Boy's middle class origins and his wish to enact Viking ritual. In the rewrite he watches a Bill Oddie DVD in order to understand animal behaviour.

plans of murder. At this point, there is an abrupt shift to the final scene, where Claire is seen welcoming the choir again into the rehearsal room, seemingly having reached acceptance and understanding through her encounter with The Boy. The choir sing a song of inclusion and peace, 'We're All In Here', which the audience are invited to join in with, using an overhead projection of the words.

The play presents a series of dialogic and often antagonistic interactions between Claire and various Others including The Boy, finally enacting the kinds of relationality Mouffe and Sennett suggest are productive. The structure of *The Events* at first suggests that it might conform to tragic tropes of closure by redemption or vengeance. Claire gathers evidence from a variety of sources to debate the issues around what occurred and in order to reach the closure of complete understanding before she proceeds to her final encounter with The Boy. However, the play rejects a Hegelian dialectical structure wherein the protagonist is able to synthesise the different ideas she has encountered to a form coherent, clear minded finality of understanding and action. Instead, when she meets The Boy face to face she neither forgives nor murders: she simply witnesses and listens. She cannot come to a definitive conclusion; as in the Lévinasian concept of the Other, The Boy's face is obfuscated and unknowable to Claire. It is Claire's lack of ability to synthesise her multiple understandings of The Boy which allows her to begin work with her community choir again. Constructing unity from different opinions is impossible, as Nancy and Blanchot have argued in their critiques of community. Irresolvable differences of opinion and dialogue allow Claire to rediscover a productively dialogic construction of community.

In *The Golden Dragon*, the audience were presented with dissonant images: a male actor dressed as a woman, using caricatured movements to present femininity, encouraged laughter, whilst the actor was simultaneously taking part in narrative that was philosophical and tragic, encouraging rapt attention and respect. The production attempted to create in the audience a state of unease about how to respond. In *Crave* and *Illusions* the audience was moved into a publicly lit area to watch how they and the others around them responded to untrustworthy narratives, and

again the instinct to laugh along with the audience as a whole was undercut by the possibility that such laughter could be unwarranted or intolerant. In *The Events*, as we will see, the audience were framed as a community themselves, and the tension between group cohesion and the individuality in that community are foregrounded, echoing the themes in the narrative itself.

This use of the audience was ATC's most sophisticated yet; it was also arguably its least successful, as I will recount below. At the end of the play, the audience were invited to sing along with words projected on surtitles above the stage during the performance, encouraging a unified but self-consciously problematic audience cohesion with the community choir. The words of the song reflected the idea of the romantic unified community so distrusted by Nancy. Each spectator was faced with an ethical choice whether to respond as part of the crowd and to join the inviting unity of song, or to respond with silence, marking them out as different from the rest of the constructed community of theatre audience, as in the instance I described in the Introduction. This positioning of the audience was complex; unlike in *The Golden Dragon* or *Crave*/*Illusions*, *The Events* presented the audience with an unavoidable, explicitly ethical choice. Gray's previous productions for ATC, as I have argued, position their audiences in similarly uncomfortable positions, but did not create a specific moment where an active gesture is required on the part of the audience. However, a number of professional critics and academics did not recognise this moment as problematic and were overcome by the positive energy of the act of singing together. Gray and ATC underestimated the power of what Bauman calls the 'paradise lost'.[445]

***The Events*: Stage Design**

[445] Bauman, *Community*, p. 3.

The set for *The Events*, according to the text, is simply '...in a room, the sort of place in which a choir might rehearse. There is an urn'.[446] In each theatre the production toured to, the space was opened up to reveal its architecture, often exposing a space that was unattractive, untidy and sterile. In order for the choir to be accommodated comfortably, a raked podium was erected at the back of the playing space; this foregrounded the relationship between the choir and the audience who, in most venues, were seated in raked seating, mirroring the choir. The set looked unfinished, as if the production were still in the rehearsal studio. Each theatre's architecture was exposed as a metatheatrical device to remind the audience of the production's status as a piece of theatre, but also to portray the area as a *seemingly* neutral space, one which might allow the audience to embark on an imaginative journey, unencumbered by any significant stage dressing.

Figure 10. The pre-set for *The Events*, the Young Vic (dir. Ramin Gray, 2013), Photo by Christine Twite.

[446] Greig, *The Events*, p. 7.

This aesthetic produced, of course, not simply an 'empty space' but was carefully constructed to resemble a community centre. An old trestle table, usually one taken from the backstage properties area, was placed stage left and a tired-looking tea urn with simple crockery were placed on top. Gray remarked in rehearsals that he wanted to create the aesthetics of a local community centre or church hall, a place for public events, exchange and debate; cheap but trustworthy objects were chosen which would be seen in such spaces. The stage furniture seemed ad hoc at the play's opening, but the 'community space' setting became apparent as the narrative progressed. *The Events* was presented as a kind of local public forum or activity, where ideas are discussed and a community comes together. Furthermore, because the space looked somewhat like a rehearsal room, it also recalled the dialogic space of Gray's rehearsals. The presence of a 'real' community choir on stage heightened the sense that this was a community and rehearsal space. *The Events*, from its outset, then, seemed to offer a performance space of dialogue and debate, recalling David Greig's manifesto on his work, *Rough Theatre*, where he argues that an unfinished playing space, without the polish of naturalistic design, can privilege a politics of debate and imagination over one of dogma and stultification.[447] The set physically manifested the ideas of dialogic interaction fundamental to the production.

The Creation and Production of *The Events*

The Events began as a conversation between Ramin Gray and established Scottish playwright David Greig at the Edinburgh Festival in 2011, during which *The Golden Dragon* was running at the Traverse theatre. Both were deeply shocked by the Anders Breivik massacre in Norway the month before, and were interested in constructing a theatre piece in response. Gray states in his introduction to the text of *The Events* that

[447] Greig, 'Rough Theatre'.

> [Breivik's] actions set out to destroy one community while simultaneously galvanising other communities around the world. From simple outpourings of grief, through reams of testimony, heated debate, lengthy judicial process, psychiatric analysis and raw soul-searching to the writing and performing of this play, it's clear that we need to churn over such events in order to understand.[448]

The Events is not a retelling of the events of the massacre itself; it tells the fictional story of a younger man in Scotland who massacres a community choir. The play was commissioned by ATC and the Drammatikkenshus, Oslo, the first commission of Gray's tenure. During a month of research in Norway, Gray and Greig interviewed psychologists, sociologists, members of the police, journalists and even some of the survivors of the Norway massacre.[449] This experience formed the basis of *The Events*, and news of an early draft caused a flurry of media attention from British papers in March 2012. John Browne, with whom Gray had previously worked on participatory work at the Royal Opera House, was employed as music director and composer.

By the beginning of 2013 Greig had created a workable script for the project that went into rehearsal from June 2013 at the Jerwood Studio in Southwark, where *Crave* had previously been rehearsed. Greig sat in rehearsals with the production team for a week, discussing and editing the script, then continued to contact them most days of rehearsal to discuss ideas and changes. The final published script contains many differences to the text used in performance, and I have sketched the major points of difference below.

I witnessed none of the power struggles which directors and writers are so often purported to have in rehearsal. The rehearsal room was a working example of Boenish's concept of regie, not a site of power struggle but instead

[448] Greig, *The Events*.
[449] 'The Events - Q&A with Writer David Greig'.

> [...] a living space of thinking, and of thinking differently, a vital room for possibilities, a vibrant place for dissensus.[450]

I noticed dissent and disagreement, but this never descended into hostility or argument. Disagreement was usually framed by the kind of playful practice described in my account of Gray's rehearsals in Chapter Four. During the third week, as the company were rehearsing the moment when Claire imagines taking The Boy's soul into her breath, Gray asked the actors to physicalise this encounter through play fighting.[451] Playful antagonism was literalised in the room, as actors Neve McIntosh and Rudi Dharmalingam each tried to overcome the other.[452]

[450] Boenisch, pp. 191–92.
[451] Greig, *The Events*, p. 42.
[452] Twite, 'Christine Steps Into Crave Rehearsals'.

Figure 11. Neve McIntosh and Rudi Dharmalingam play fight during a rehearsal for *The Events*, the Jerwood Space (3 July 2013), Photo by Christine Twite.

The 'mystery guest' scheme was running as in Gray's earlier rehearsals, so that rather than keeping the creative process hidden, it was opened up by inviting members of the public and other practitioners to observe and give feedback. A different guest sat in on rehearsal each day, invited via ATC's mailing list and website. Each day the team had new people with whom to discuss ideas. Live tweeting from the rehearsal rooms was encouraged, and the ATC Facebook page was updated with

footage from the rehearsals. The production emerged from a dynamic and dialogical environment in which constant feedback was requested by Gray. One rehearsal I attended saw Gray put Greig on speakerphone, as the company discussed the wording of one part of the text.

Separate to these rehearsals was the work being coordinated in ATC's office to source another element of the performance: a community choir from the location of each theatre on the forthcoming tour, who participated in the performance and were present on stage throughout. Gray states that whilst he and Greig were in Norway they happened to visit a local community choir, as someone in their group needed to pick up their mother from rehearsal. Gray said:

> It seemed that here, gathered together in a hall, was the clearest riposte to Breivik's act: a disparate group of people, bonding themselves into a community through the shared activity of song. And it was halfway through the rehearsal that David and I turned to each other and said: this is our play, isn't it? It's about the choice between working together to make something or ripping it apart, between creation and destruction, between harmony and discord.[453]

Here, Gray suggests a simple equation between community, creation and harmony, in opposition to the destructive and discordant act of one person. In fact, the production would challenge this binary and explore the productive tension between unity and individuality. The office staff at ATC, headed by assistant director Polina Kalinina, enlisted a new local choir for each performance of *The Events*. The choirs were told about the nature of the play, the songs and interactions that they would have to perform on the day, but importantly were not shown or told the story of the play. In a mirror image of the audience on stage (dramaturgically recalling the move of the audience from auditorium to stage in *Crave* and *Illusions*), the choir members would be seeing the actors and hearing the full

[453] Ramin Gray and John Browne, 'The Events by David Greig Choir Pack', 2014.

story for the first time, and reacting to them as such. *The Events* thus ensured that a local community was in attendance for each performance of the play, both on the stage and in the audience; discounted tickets were given to friends and families of the choirs involved to encourage them to watch the performance.

The critical success of *The Events*' premiere at the Edinburgh festival and first tour in 2013 meant that the production was able to tour during 2014 and 2015. In 2013 the first tour visited locations including Glasgow, Dublin, Oxford, Birmingham and the Young Vic in London, which was a co-producer of the show. It toured twice again in 2014, with a different cast, to places including Cardiff, Liverpool, Belfast and Cork. The production had its American premiere in New Haven, Connecticut in June 2014, and subsequently visited Columbus, Ohio and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.[454] *The Events* was co-commissioned by the Drammatikkenshus in Oslo (the national centre for developing new writing in Norway) and co-produced by the Brageteatret (a theatre in Drammen, Norway, close to Oslo and the site of the Breivik massacre). A version in Norwegian, named *Heldensen* meaning 'event' in Norwegian, was directed by Gray and toured Norway throughout March and April 2014.[455] *The Events* was also co-produced by Schauspielhaus Wein in Vienna, who mounted the production in German naming it *Die Ereignisse*. The production showed in rep between November 2013 and June 2014. The fact that the three productions were simultaneously being performed allowed them all to join together for three performances in the Young Vic on the 10th and 12th of July 2014. As Gray explained:

> On each night, a different actor [plays] Claire, the vicar coming to terms with a mass shooting in her parish, in her native tongue, while the male actors, who play all the other

[454] For full tour details, please see: Actors Touring Company, 'Actors Touring Company Official Website'.
[455] 'David Greig: "I Always Knew I'd Put The Events in Front of a Norwegian Audience" - Telegraph' <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/10742089/David-Greig-I-always-knew-Id-put-The-Events-in-front-of-a-Norwegian-audience.html> [accessed 29 October 2014].

> characters en route, [...] perform a third of the play each in theirs. The audience and the choir, which changes each night, [...] see surtitles to keep up. [456]

The choirs onstage were from the London borough of Lambeth, in which the Young Vic is situated, and were able to follow the narrative via stage surtitles in English, which also allowed the audience to follow the action. A final revival in 2015 saw the production tour to the Hackney Showroom in London, the Curran Theatre in California and the Guthrie Theatre in *Minnesota.*

Gray and Greig in Collaboration

Prior to *The Events*, Gray and Greig had worked together twice. As a freelancer for the Royal Shakespeare Company, Gray directed Greig's *The American Pilot* in 2005. This play is set in a civil war of an unknown location, where an American pilot has crash landed. He is at once the character of the American pilot and a figurative representation of America itself and its relations with other countries. It is written in the manner of a *Lehrstuck*, a Brechtian parable.[457] Clare Wallace argues that

> *The American Pilot* permits a reversed encounter with the Other that raises a host of questions about how to act, and the brutalities of dreams and realities in an era of globalized conflict.[458]

[456] Matt Trueman, 'Tag Wrestling in Three Languages: The Events Stages a Radical Coup de Theatre', *Guardian*, 4 July 2014, section Stage <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/jul/04/the-events-play-tag-three-languages-shooting-breivik> [accessed 29 October 2014].
[457] Clare Wallace, *The Theatre of David Greig* (London: A&C Black, 2013), p. 141.
[458] Wallace, p. 141.

This succinct analysis applies equally to *The Events*. Dan Rebellato suggests that *The American Pilot* 'insists on a global perspective as well as local engagement, sees what divides us as well as what connects us'.[459] *The Events* develops this theme of unity and opposition.

A yet more significant piece of Greig's for my argument here is *Ramallah*, which Gray directed in March 2004, a ten-minute-long play written for a one night event at The Royal Court (at which Gray was an Associate Director) to celebrate the work of the Court's international department. *Ramallah* was a response to Greig's experiences when he visited the Palestinian city in 2001 with director Rufus Norris, supported by The Royal Court, in order to create a piece of theatre at the Al Kasba theatre.[460] More important than the piece they made, according to Greig, was the experience of working with INAD (meaning stubborn in Arabic) theatre. INAD were a Bethlehem theatre company with roots in theatre-in-education. Greig watched them stage a group of plays by young Palestinians during his visit, which they achieved despite the theatre being on the front line of fighting: it had been badly shelled and its roof had fallen down.[461] *Ramallah*, in Wallace's words, is

> [...] a sardonically self-critical snapshot of the conflicts intrinsic to how to represent and respond to the West Bank from an outsider's positing and an acknowledgement that perhaps that it is not even really possible.[462]

The play sees a privileged Westerner, ostensibly Greig, return home from witnessing such a performance on the West Bank, where he tried to understand, synthesise and describe the experience with his wife. *The Events* is directly related to this work – Claire is also trying to make sense of violence which has occurred off-stage – but in *The Events* the atrocities occur on the home

[459] Introduction in David Greig, *Plays Volume One: Europe, The Architect, and The Cosmonaut's Last Message to the Woman He Once Loved in the Former Soviet Union* (London: Methuen, 2002).
[460] Wallace, p. 136.
[461] Greig, 'Rough Theatre'.
[462] Wallace, p. 138.

ground of the protagonist. An act of war physically impinges on Claire's middle-class, privileged life on Scotland soil, and cannot be escaped.

Greig would later revisit his experience in Palestine in his seminal essay 'Rough Theatre', where he explains that this experience was instrumental in developing his own writing.[463] 'Rough Theatre' documents Greig's rejection of the 1970s and 1980s explicitly 'political' drama of Howard Brenton and David Edger. He states that he:

> [wants] to get away from theatre that proposed dialectical solutions in the old left-wing tradition and offer a theatre that [tears] at the fabric of reality and [opens] up the multiple possibilities of the imagination.[464]

Greig's theatre explores the complexities of the contemporary political and social world, rather than offering up an overt condemnation or recommendation of particular politics or policies. The 'multiple possibilities of the imagination' encourage the audience to approach political difficulties and realities playfully, potentially allowing an audience of diverse backgrounds and political leanings to take part in this process. Rough theatre, for Greig, is 'unfinished' aesthetically, but also ideologically: he poses conundrums without obvious solutions.[465] He explicitly uses the idea of the '"negative dialectic" [...] Adorno's concept of a [...] contradiction which disrupts rationality' as demonstrative of this process. Thus he proposes a rejection of the idea of synthesis in Hegelian dialectics, the impossibility of complete sublimation.[466]

A consideration of Greig's and Gray's work on 'Rough Theatre' and Gray's involvement with Greig during the process of its construction is a productive way in to understanding *The Events*. *Ramallah* rehearses the depiction of white middle-class bewilderment and confusion in the face of

[463] Greig, 'Rough Theatre'.
[464] Greig, 'Rough Theatre', p. 212.
[465] Greig, 'Rough Theatre', p. 220.
[466] Greig, 'Rough Theatre', p. 220; Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 247.

extremism, war and its associated horrors, which is again staged in *The Events*. But it also offers a framework for reading *The Events* as a production which rejects a simple binary of community versus violence. As in Nancy's inoperative community, which relies on the interrelationality of 'being the one with the other',[467] Greig and Gray advocate dialogue and discussion as an end in themselves, rather than a unity of understanding that simplifies and potentially excludes.

However, an analysis of audience and critical reactions to *The Events* suggests that this negative dialectic, to borrow from Adorno, was not always recognised. The next section explores a variety of these spectatorial responses, and suggests reasons for them.

Critical Reception and the Sense of Community in *The Events*

Figure 12. The choir on stage, *The Events*, Quarterhouse (dir. Ramin Gray, 2013), Photo by Rodney Smith.

[467] Nancy p. xxi.

This desire to challenge binary thinking and to critique community was not reflected in *The Events*' ecstatic critical reception. The production was exceptionally well received in Britain at its premier at the Edinburgh festival. It was later voted 'Best Theatre of 2013' by critics in the *Guardian* and won the Carol Tambor Award as well as a Fringe First by The Scotsman.[468] Lyn Gardner wrote that the production was

> [...] about the things that bind us together as a community, the things that drive us apart, and what it is that makes us human. Throughout, the choir are present on stage, their voices soaring as they sing what cannot be said. [469]

Whilst Gardner does mention 'the things that drive us apart', her reading of the play suggests that she is affirming the liberal humanist belief that we are all, in essence, the same. This is underscored by her description of the choirs' 'soaring' voices, and her conflation of the performers and the readers of the review into one global community of 'us'. Key to this essentialist reading is the understanding of singing as an instinctual act of togetherness. The choir, in Gardner's description, is an affectual, unspoken demonstration of the power of community to unite. Dominic Cavendish of *The Daily Telegraph* wrote about the production in a similar style, using the pronoun 'we' three times during his review, referring to the audience of the production but also suggesting a wider 'we' of the Telegraph readership, relating the events in the first person plural to highlight the sense of community which the play, in his reading, constructs. Like Gardner, his review focused on the affectual power of the choir – they are 'beautiful' – rather than trying to analyse what affective work it might have been doing. He writes that

[468] Actors Touring Company, 'Actors Touring Company Official Website'.
[469] Lyn Gardner, 'The Events – Edinburgh Festival 2013 Review', *Guardian*, 5 August 2013 <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/aug/05/the-events-edinburgh-festival-review> [accessed 30 October 2014].

> [...] we see a woman [...] try to comprehend a massacre she only narrowly survived [...] We see and hear [...] a choir – 14-strong, singing beautifully on a simple stage that might be its rehearsal space. We see too the non-cooperative outsider in its midst, played by Rudi Dharmalingam [...][470]

It is notable that these reviews remain decidedly descriptive rather than analytical: they appear unquestioning in their depiction a sense of audience 'togetherness' as a simple positive force. Michael Coveney of WhatsOnStage.com writes that 'it's part of the play's generosity of spirit, and political optimism, to obliterate social and gender demarcation lines' through the casting of Dharmalingam, who had to portray a variety of different characters.[471] Coveney reads 'political optimism' into the fact that Dharmalingham is a man of colour, suggesting that *The Events* offers an example of humanist togetherness and a synthesis of difference. These theatre critics seem overwhelmed by the strength of togetherness that the production created, and each of these examples specifically cites use of the on-stage choir as key to this. Alice Jones best depicts this in her five-star Independent review, concluding

> It is [the community choir's] singing which has the last word on the power of community to overcome even the darkest deed.[472]

[470] Dominic Cavendish, 'Edinburgh Festival 2013: The Events, Traverse Theatre Review', *Telegraph*, 5 August 2013 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/edinburgh-festival-reviews/10223230/Edinburgh-Festival-2013-The-Events-Traverse-Theatre.html> [accessed 3 April 2014].
[471] Michael Coveney, 'The Events at the Edinburgh Fringe - Four Stars', *What's On Stage*, 5 August 2013 <http://www.whatsonstage.com/edinburgh-theatre/reviews/08-2013/the-events-edinburgh-fringe_31517.html> [accessed 30 October 2014].
[472] Alice Jones, 'Edinburgh 2013: The Events - David Greig's Play Drawn on Anders Breivik's Norway Killings', *Independent*, 6 August 2013 <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/edinburgh-2013-the-events--david-greigs-play-drawn-on-anders-breiviks-norway-killings-8748119.html> [accessed 30 October 2014].

But perhaps the most overwhelmingly positive response to the construction of community in *The Events* comes from dramaturg Aaron Malkin, who shares a similarly essentialist perspective and expresses the concept of community in strikingly pervasive and grandiose tones:

> And in putting nonprofessional choirs on stage, we see both the beauty of a community and the unique personality of each individual within that community. [...] Humanity is returned to the victims as we, in essence, watch ourselves confront trauma and contemplate loss [...] Above all, however, *The Events* resonated as a celebration of community. [...] But, by grounding the piece as he does dramaturgically, it is elevated to the mythic, and the community Greig ultimately engenders is boundless, transcending time and space, spanning millennia and continents as he follows in the timeless tradition of grappling with what it means to be human in the face of tragedy.[473]

Malkin's depiction of community bears striking similarities to Nancy's conception of the romanticised community based on nostalgia; its 'timeless' 'humanity' recalls Nancy's lost community of 'the natural family, the Athenian city, the Roman Republic, the first Christian community' which he describes as futile and destructive.[474]

The powerful positive affect that the production seems to have had on the audience is also noted in another useful resource on spectatorship reaction to *The Events*: the British Theatre Consortium's 2014 study investigating cultural value, entitled 'Critical Mass: Theatre Spectatorship and Value Attribution'.[475] Although not solely based on *The Events* (overall 14 productions were assessed at the Young Vic, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Drum Theatre, Plymouth), it was

[473] Aaron Malkin, 'Backpages 26.1 (The Events: (Re)Building a Community)', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 26.1 (2016), 110–23 (p. 116).
[474] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 13.
[475] Reinelt and others.

specifically developed to assess spectators' value attribution to performance and the study offers insight into spectator reactions which would otherwise have been lost. The project

> [...] collected self-descriptions of experiences of individuals who attended the theatre, which were gathered through online surveys, personal interviews, and creative workshops.[476]

The work as a whole did not break down in detail the audience responses in terms of the specific productions, but Janelle Reinelt and Chris Megson in a separate publication on the work said of *The Events* that

> [...] the spectators we interviewed mostly spoke about how moved they were by the performance, and especially by the amateur choirs that nightly participated in the action. Recruited from local neighbourhoods and regions, these choirs brought a freshness and reality to the production that our subjects could not often explain but definitely felt ... The strong affect of this performance on its spectators was the key piece of knowledge that we took away from these interviews: it was evidenced, not specifically in what they said, as much as the tone, inflections and rhythms in which they spoke about their experiences.[477]

The focus on the tone rather than the words of the audience members interviewed seems to reflect the theatre critics' similar inability to articulate their responses to *The Events*, in particular the strong affect which the production, and the choir in particular, produced for many spectators. Some of the choirs themselves were also asked about their experiences, and one chorister wrote: 'The play is

[476] Reinelt and others, p. 5.
[477] Chris Megson and Janelle Reinelt, 'Performance, Experience, Transformation: What Do Spectators Value in Theatre?', *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English*, 4.1 (2016), 227–242 (pp. 233–34).

about healing a community through music, and I felt that happen inside myself as I was performing the piece with my own community and with an audience of my peers and neighbours'.[478] I was often surprised that in the final moments of *The Events* each night, a number of audience members were moved to tears by the final song, clearly overwhelmed.

It is important to note that whilst Reinelt and Megson's research found that in general spectators focused more on affective responses to performances, when questioned straight after viewing

> [...] two months after a performance, the values most readily identified by its spectators are what we might call cognitive ones: the ideas and thought provoked by the performance and the political significance of the show.[479]

Whilst this could account in part for the privileging affective responses by the audience, Reinelt and Megson's article suggests that these responses to *The Events* were unusual.

The academic reception of *The Events* demonstrates a more nuanced response to the production than the reviewers. In general, writing on the play notes the ambiguity towards community that I have suggested is inherent in this play. Paola Botham, for example, argues that

> [a]t a collective level, a necessary questioning of the notion of identity underpins the ambivalence of community itself which, like Greig's metonymical choir, can include or exclude, but only precariously.[480]

[478] Malkin.
[479] Reinelt and others, p. 29.
[480] Paola Botham, 'From Tribe to Chorus: David Greig's The Events', *2014 TCG National Conference: Crossing Borders {Art | People} Blog*, 2014 <http://www.tcgcircle.org/2014/07/from-tribe-to-chorus-david-greigs-the-events/> [accessed 20 May 2016].

I agree with Marilena Zaroulia that

> [...] ATC's production of *The Events* never appeared complete or concluded, capturing an aesthetic style that resonated with the incomplete and ongoing nature of debates around identity, difference, and community.[481]

But in general, these critiques approach the idea of community through the representation of the two actors. Like the reviews, they sidestep the articulation of the work the on-stage choir might have been doing, focussing on the figure of The Boy and Claire. Zaroulia's excellent recent article suggests that The Boy embodies the shifting identity of the Other, arguing that

> [...] the play marks a significant intervention in representing identity and difference as interdependent terms in a multicultural world.[482]

She reads *The Events* as a direct critique of community, in that 'The Boy, the blank, marginalised Other, appears only in relation to the community, which is shaped in relation to that Other'.[483] But despite her engaging analysis of the representation of The Boy, her analysis of the on-stage community is less precise. She suggests that the choir is 'instrumental in producing a sense of intimacy – while simultaneously, like an ancient Greek chorus, witnessing and commenting on the drama' and states that

[481] Marilena Zaroulia, '"I Am a Blankness Out of Which Emerges Only Darkness": Impressions and Aporias of Multiculturalism in The Events', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 26.1 (2016), 71–81 (p. 72).
[482] Zaroulia, p. 71.
[483] Zaroulia, p. 75.

> *The Events* could be described as a gift, an invitation to communities to join in and heal through performance. At the same time, communities make a gift to ATC by volunteering to participate in the work.[484]

Zaroulia uses the metaphor of a 'gift' for the presumed effect of healing which the choirs taking part will receive, and also for the volunteer work of the choirs. It is difficult to discern how far Zaroulia buys into the notion that the choirs receive a 'gift' of healing. She is perhaps in danger of simplistically suggesting that the collaborative performance is in itself remedial, whilst also assuming that the choirs needed healing. The equation of volunteering with a 'gift' is similarly problematic. Jen Harvie's recent publication *Fair Play* analyses performances which use volunteers, and usefully recalls that we should be aware of their status as unpaid labour in the neoliberal economy.[485] Anna Abram suggests something similar to Zaroulia, albeit more socially oriented, stating that

> [t]he common good of singing together is prior to the individual differences of the choir members. This also says something about the role the arts have to play in fostering human solidarity.[486]

David Pattie reads the final moment of the choir singing as a memoriam to the lost, murdered choir members, suggesting he too failed to read in to this moment Gray's wish to suggest that the choir was *not* united:

[484] Zaroulia, pp. 79, 78.
[485] Jen Harvie, *Fair Play - Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
[486] Anna Abram, 'Solidarity and Moral Imagination in David Greig's The Events: Ethics in Conversation with Performance', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 26.1 (2016), 82–87 (p. 7).

> At the play's end, the choir face us; the response they implicitly demand is not a distanced appreciation of their skill, but an acknowledgement of the human loss their participation indicates.[487]

Thus this lacuna in exploration of the negative potential of the on-stage choir occurs in the professional reviews, the spectatorial reception and the academic response.

Community and Choirs

Why did *The Events'* on-stage choir receive such a positive and seemingly sentimental reception? Scholarship about choirs and health also portrays surprisingly romanticised notions of the community. Even a cursory look at the links between community and singing in a choir suggests, as Raymond Williams argued of the term community itself, that the relationship is exclusively seen in positive terms. In the 2012 publication by Morrison and Clift, *Singing and Mental Health*, the literature review cites research that equates group singing with only positive mental health outcomes.[488] This research was produced by the Sidney de Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health, and it may be that the outcomes collected in their data were indeed universally positive. What is significant for my argument here is the positive assumptions that underpin the use of the word community in the large the volume of writing about the power of singing.

In 'Singing the Gospel: Using Musical Practices to Build Religious and Racial Communities' Schnable suggests that '[g]ospel choir singing binds youth to the church and symbolically to the local

[487] David Pattie, '*The Events*: Immanence and the Audience', *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English*, 4.1 (2016), 49–60 (p. 54).
[488] Ian Morrison and Stephen Clift, 'Singing and Mental Health' (Canterbury: Sidney de Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health, 2012) <https://www.canterbury.ac.uk/health-and-wellbeing/sidney-de-haan-research-centre/documents/singing-an-mental-health.pdf> [accessed 19 January 2017].

and global black community'.[489] She uses the word 'binds' to suggest the affect of singing: her language hints, perhaps, at the suggestion that the community created could be a restrictive rather than emancipatory, but the article itself only sees this affect as positive.[490] The use of the term 'binds' also echoes Nancy's description of his inoperative community, which instead recognises the restrictive connotations of the term and suggests instead it is

> [a] bond that forms ties without attachments, or even less fusion, [...] a bond that unbinds by binding, that reunites through the infinite exposition of an irreducible finitude.[491]

When *The Guardian* ran the headline that Greig was creating a 'musical based on the Anders Breivik's Norway killings' other news outlets were quick to condemn the future production as making light of the tragedy.[492] (The paper later withdrew this headline, implicitly acknowledging that this gave the wrong impression about the project.)[493] ATC were forced to clarify that the work was not specifically about Breivik, and definitely not a musical.[494] The offense was caused because the term musical is still inextricably linked in the popular imagination to light entertainment and comedy, with uplifting expressions of the positive rather than cultural critique. In the *Critical Mass*

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[489] Allison Schnable, 'Singing the Gospel: Using Musical Practices to Build Religious and Racial Communities', *Poetics*, 40.3 (2012), 278–98 (p. 278) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2012.04.001>.
[490] Other examples of this are: Jukka Louhivuori, Veli-Matti Salminen, and Edward Lebaka, '"Singing Together": A Crosscultural Approach to the Meaning of Choirs As a Community', in *Cultural Diversity in Music Education*, ed. by Patricia Shehan Campbell (Bowen Hills: Australian Academic Press, 2005), pp. 81–92 <https://search.informit.com.au/fullText;dn=386981901084587;res=IELHSS> [accessed 19 January 2017]; Karen Ahlquist, *Chorus and Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Heather Gridley and others, 'Benefits of Group Singing for Community Mental Health and Wellbeing', *Victorian Health Promotion Foundation*, 1 (2011), 13–24; Betty A. Bailey and Jane W. Davidson, 'Effects of Group Singing and Performance for Marginalized and Middle-Class Singers', *Psychology of Music*, 33.3 (2005), 269–303; Martin Ashley, 'Singing, Gender and Health: Perspectives from Boys Singing in a Church Choir', *Health Education*, 102.4 (2002), 180–87.
[491] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. xi.
[492] Vanessa Thorpe, 'UK Playwright Plans Show Drawing on Anders Breivik's Norway Killings', *Guardian*, 24 March 2013, section World news <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/24/musical-anders-breivik-uk-premiere> [accessed 25 October 2014].
[493] Thorpe.
[494] Thorpe; Staff, Editorial, 'ATC Clarifies The Events by David Greig as a Fictional Story', *Broadway World*, 26 March 2013 <http://www.broadwayworld.com/westend/article/ATC-Clarifies-THE-EVENTS-by-David-Greig-as-a-Fictional-Story-20130326> [accessed 25 February 2017].

audience project, not only musicals but music in general was associated with populism and light-heartedness by the respondents:

> The most surprising finding in the research was that, even when respondents said that they enjoyed the use of live music in *Mother Courage*, they were not expecting it. The majority did not see music as appropriate to 'serious' thought-provoking theatre of the kind that they expected from the Library Company. Live music is something these audience members associate with commercial touring shows, becoming the clearest indicator of a difference between thought-provoking drama and popular entertainment.[495]

Of course, this is a misconception about the use of much music on stage and a simplification of musicals as a genre, but the equation of singing with non-serious, light entertainment persists.

I want to suggest that if *The Events* does owe anything to the musicals, it is the musical *Cabaret*, which was first performed in 1966 and depicts the Weimar republic on the cusp of Nazi rule. It demonstrates the power of group singing to reinforce sentimental fascist political beliefs in its song *Tomorrow Belongs to Me* sung by a young blond member of the Hitler Youth. His song causes the watching citizens to a spontaneously sing along and rise to their feet, passionately joining in with the naive and childlike lyrics of the song. *The Events* offers its audience a comparable critique of both community and singing, suggesting that singing can be healing and redemptive and build positive communities, but simultaneously that it can potentially produce a dangerously unthinking acceptance of community as a positive.

We're All In Here?

[495] Reinelt and others, p. 11.

The lyrics of the final song were devised by John Brown after the text had gone to print, and are recorded below. They are therefore not part of the printed script (which may explain the lack of analysis of this moment), but were a significant moment during the production. I have printed the lyrics in their entirety below.[496]

Outside it's dark

Outside it's raining but

In here there is warmth

And people, everyone, the rehab man,

And young mums from the centre,

Waheed and Isaac, and Agnessa too,

Some people from the church,

The service users

And we're all here, we're all in here

Sometimes Chantal and Kai just wander in

And Simon brings his sister

And people, everyone, the Polish crew,

The young man with the temper

Ex-offenders

And we're all here, we're all in here[497]

[496] Each time *The Events* is revived the choir are given 'We're All In Here' as their final song: it should be thus taken as a canonical part of the text.

[497] Lyrics courtesy of Jess Banks, General Manager for Actors Touring Company

The words are simple, describing a physical space which is frequented by a number of different people who, based on their names, seem to come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. It could be read as a celebration of diversity and social welfare. The term 'service users' is a word used by social and health workers to describe their clients. But I want to explore the possibility that it also can be read as simplistic and naive, child-like in its simple, succinct language, promoting a one-dimensional pro-community ideal, as in Nancy's conception of the nostalgia innate within the term community, where he suggests that its invocation tries to recreate the lost community of 'the natural family, the Athenian city, the Roman Republic, the first Christian community'.[498] Of course, the members of the community in the song are explicitly not as homogenous as those in Nancy's examples. But the reiteration of the phrase 'we're all in here, we're all in here' suggests that the location of community centre or theatre can efface all difference in the warmth of community.

In the final moment of the performance the audience were asked to sing along to the song above. The words were projected as surtitles above the stage, recalling a school assembly. To me, this suggested a deliberate infantilisation of the audience: they were likened to children mindlessly following projected text. The invitation to sing at this moment becomes provocative when we acknowledge that some audience members may have been uncomfortable with the ideas in the song, or its seeming naïve optimism (as I certainly felt in the moment). As in the moment of singing in the middle of the play, which I described in the Introduction, the invitation could not be ignored: each spectator was obliged to make an active choice whether to join in with the song or to remain silent. The dramaturgy positioned the audience into an unavoidable ethical decision which is manifested in an action. This choice of whether to join in or remain silent is key to my understanding of the production as a whole and despite my admission that many audience members may have been won over by the affective power of the choir at this point, my experience was of much awkwardness and half-hearted singing.

[498] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 13.

'We're all in here' is based on an event which occurred during Breivik's trial. Breivik mentioned in court that the song *Children of the Rainbow* was an example of how cultural Marxists had infiltrated Norwegian schools. In response 40,000 people converged at a central square in Oslo in to sing the song together.[499] *Children of the Rainbow* is Lillebjorn Nilsen's Norwegian version of American folk music singer Pete Seeger's *Rainbow Race* (released in 1973). The lyrics read 'Together we shall live / Each sister and each brother / Little children of the Rainbow / And a fertile earth'.[500] Like *We're All In Here*, *Children of the Rainbow* celebrates diversity and togetherness in simplistic, hackneyed and childish terms. In a YouTube video of the thousands of singers, Lillebjorn Nilsen leads the crowds in a rendition of the song accompanied on his ukulele, an instrument which in Britain is still associated with the comedic songs of George Formby, or more recently the instrument first introduced to school children when the learn music in primary school.[501] I contend that 'We're All in Here' borrows from the aesthetics of this moment and interrogates it, not to suggest that the event was meaningless or that the people in the crowds who sang *Children of the Rainbow* were naïve and unthinking, but to encourage an interrogation of a simplistic and generalised language of community, which bears a resemblance to the linguistic attributes of propaganda, and to trouble its position as the final word on the complex issues that emerge from this play. The nostalgic construction of community contained in these lyrics, as the theorists I discussed in Chapter One argue, promote an idealistic unity which in practice can lead to totalitarianism, and I suggest that *The Events* is highly aware of this[502]

The choreography that took place during this final song of *The Events* was intended to suggest dissent and discomfort with the naivety of the lyrics, as I discussed with Gray.[503] About a quarter of the choir members were asked to take turns during the chorus to put up their hands and

[499] Tom Rise, *Thousands in Norway Sing Peace Song Children Of The Rainbow Against Right-Wing Terrorism*, 2012 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mr5bU9WuYxA> [accessed 24 January 2017].
[500] Staff, 'Norwegians Heckle Mass Killer Anders Breivik with Pete Seeger Children's Song', *CBSNews*, 26 April 2012 <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/norwegians-heckle-mass-killer-anders-breivik-with-pete-seeger-childrens-song/> [accessed 24 January 2017].
[501] Rise.
[502] Habermas, p. 112.
[503] Interview with Ramin Gray at the ATC Office, 2017.

sing 'I'm not here', a task specifically designed to undermine the song's lyrics.[504] This moment was a contentious one within the production crew because, as Jess Banks the stage manager of the production pointed out, the audiences seemed to misinterpret this to mean that the choir members with their hands up were the ones killed, thus reinforcing the sentimentality of the moment rather than undermining it.[505]

As an audience member at many performances, I did not notice the choir members putting up their hands or singing 'I'm not in here', and a group of students from Queen Mary University of London who attended the performance at the Young Vic did not notice it either. However, talking with a range of these first year Drama students, I was again reminded of the discomfort that many audience members felt at being asked to participate in the song. The class had attended a performance at the Young Vic a few days earlier, and many had felt that the ending felt 'fake', 'cheesy' or 'uncomfortable'. Why did these reactions occur? After such a sophisticated discussion about multiculturalism, community and inclusion in the production, the final song felt a reflection of what The Boy has articulated earlier on in the play, a 'cheap togetherness – which is an illusion fostered by failed elites who cling on to power and wealth through immigrant labour and globalisation'.[506] This was the unease, a moment of a specific affectual state, that was consciously constructed by the production.

In the play itself, a distrust of sentiment around community has already been expressed by both Claire and The Boy. Claire is told by Catriona, her partner, that events similar to the play's final 'community' song are occurring: that the locals are gathering with '[f]lowers, singing, [and] lamps', which seems to conflate the image of the Rose March in 2011 just after the massacre in Norway and the communal singing of *Children of the Rainbow* in 2012.[507] She responds by saying '[i]t's not love, /

[504] 'Interview with Ramin Gray at the ATC Office'.
[505] Interview with Jess Banks at ATC Office, 2017.
[506] Greig, *The Events*.
[507] Greig, *The Events*, p. 22.

It's sentiment. / If it were love, / It would be for him'.[508] Here she recalls The Boy's earlier statement that he kills to protect his 'tribe' (itself an absolutist form of community based on ethnic similarity) against 'cheap togetherness'.[509] As Claire acknowledges, the songs create a community which gains is sense of self from its opposition to the Other, be it The Boy or Breivik. They are focussed *on* and intimately connected *to* the individual they are trying to exclude.

This final scene of *The Events* is paradoxically similar to its opening scene, when The Boy enters the choir room and the choir sing. The Boy enters the room, welcomed by Claire. He is obviously distressed, rocking 'on the balls of his feet'.[510] Claire battles with The Boy's apparent reluctance to join in:

> You can help me put out chairs if you like?
>
> Do you speak English? [...]
>
> Why don't you sit with us and if you feel like singing –sing
>
> And if you don't feel like singing.
>
> Well that's OK too.
>
> Nobody feels like singing all the time.
>
> Ha ha.
>
> Sit.
>
> Sing.[511]

The Boy rejects Claire's polite entreaty to take part, whether it be putting out the chairs or singing. He does not conform to the customary behaviour of the community choir. He instead pulls out his gun and shoots. Refusing to sing becomes a violent political gesture.

[508] Greig, *The Events*, p. 22.
[509] Greig, *The Events*, p. 20.
[510] Greig, *The Events*, p. 12.
[511] Greig, *The Events*, pp. 12–13.

Written into the play and its performance is an innate discomfort around the idea not taking part, about 'standing out from the crowd' or 'being different'. In the case of The Boy in the first scene this idea is taken to a violent conclusion: instead of taking the cue to join in the communal song, he shoots down members of the choir. A consideration of the choice between complying with a group and taking part or refusing and taking a different path is marked throughout *The Events*, and is embodied in the audience as they too make choices to sing along or to remain silent.

Figure 13. Clifford Samuel as The Boy, *The Events*, Southbank Centre (dir. Ramin Gray, 2013), Photo by David Levine.

Early in the play there is a scene in which The Boy responds to 'frequently asked questions', a title often used on websites to clarify what the website is about or how to access the services it offers. Here instead, The Boy parades about the stage with a microphone, choosing members of the on-stage choir to ask him a question. The scene is redolent of a television game show: The Boy, as the presenter, is at all times in control, performing energy and positive enthusiasm, whilst the choir members (having only been shown these lines in the hours before the performance) stumble over

the script they read. The overall effect is disconcerting. The choir members understandably often mispronounce words, stumble over the lines or merely read them without inflection: they are focussed on getting the lines correct rather than thinking about their meaning. As master of ceremonies, The Boy answers the mundane questions (redolent of a celebrity magazine) about his favourite song and film. One choir member asks:

> Being a tribal warrior must involve long periods of time on your own. How do you cope with the loneliness?[512]

The question, when spoken by the choir member, was performed without irony in all the instances I saw. The choir member, usually focussed on articulating the lines correctly, is seen to simply parrot these words that celebrate The Boy's identity as 'tribal warrior', feeding The Boy an inane question which he is able to answer by talking about being a visionary. He is asked about his diet ('Palaeolithic'), about his sexuality and about his beliefs in an afterlife.[513] One question asks about The Boy's favourite film. He answers 'Lord of the Rings' – there is a pause – then adds 'Part Two'.[514] The theatre audience usually respond with laughter at the moment, responding to the banality and specificity of the response. It is a clever deconstruction of celebrity culture, whilst at the same time it constructs the choir and audience as easily manipulated and unthinking. In the pressure of performing to a theatre audience no choir member was ever compelled to question this moment: they all politely recited the questions. This moment was undercut by The Boy's sudden declaration that 'I kill to protect my tribe'.[515] The tone of the performance changed, and The Boy suddenly became Catriona, Claire's partner, reading some of The Boy's manifesto.

[512] Greig, *The Events*, p. 18.
[513] Greig, *The Events*, p. 19.
[514] Greig, *The Events*, p. 19.
[515] Greig, *The Events*, p. 20.

The moment of the Frequently Asked Questions again explicitly manipulates the audience and the on-stage choir to become complicit in the propaganda which The Boy espouses. They are expertly led by The Boy to become his mouthpiece, rather than act as critical voice. The Boy creates and leads a welcoming, unthinking community of which the choir and the audience become part. Like the final moment of song, and the aforementioned *Song of Gavrillo Princep*, the audience and on-stage choir are compelled to take part rather than stand apart. Politeness and the desire not to 'cause a scene', the urge to stand in unity with others becomes a force which silently condones the extremist ideas expressed by The Boy. The audience, just like the choir, are asked to perform as a community during the performance. (The choir has a script and have been briefed beforehand, whereas the theatre spectators presumably are aware, consciously or unconsciously, of the unwritten script of how to *perform* at being an audience, which includes the imperative to respect the viewing pleasure of others and not 'stand out from the crowd'). Rather than break the moment of performance, the audience and choir continue and respond as instructed: the choir have a visible script which they follow, the audience follow an internalised script which suggests that a response of laughter to a joke on stage is the correct and polite one and that they should sing along when provided with surtitles.

As we have seen, this manipulation of both the audience and the choir onstage has not been fully recognised in *The Events'* critical reception. This manipulation emerges in the intoxicating pull of singing together and more generally in the social pressure to behave as an audience 'should' in performance. *The Events*, then, singles out for critique a liberal politeness, based on perceived need to nurture and include everyone. Greig and Gray's imagining of this liberal politeness can be usefully compared to scholars such as Miranda Joseph's critique of the romanticised community described in Chapter One, which appears to admit all but subtly excludes as it does so. Claire attempts to welcome The Boy into the warm embrace of her community choir, but he has already been too far excluded to become part of it; Joseph might argue that his exclusion is inherent to the very notion of community inherent in the choir.

ATC's production of *The Events* offers a space for the audience to watch the choir members reading from a script, to be reminded of how they themselves are following the 'script' of the theatre audience – and how they may thus be implicitly supporting unethical ideas. There is an air of banality in this group control; it is unspoken, jovial and enticing. However, I want to acknowledge here that this dramaturgical strategy may not have 'worked', because although the power of the feeling of warmth and community in the choir is only partially reflected in the audience's final sing-along, the positive critical reception of 'community' in this play suggest that at least some audience members' reactions ironically affirmed the power of ideological community/grouping that the play tried to problematise. Looking back at the final moment and the invitation to sing together, the statements offered in the song look manipulative, offering a vague propaganda and encouraging thoughtless repetition by the audience. It is clear that some audience members were indeed manipulated. As in much of Gray's work, the audience were deliberately put in an ethically precarious and an affectively and ethically compromised position here. Whether every spectator is fully aware of this cannot be legislated for.

Liberal Values Under Fire

Claire is a figurehead for middle-class liberalism in *The Events*, living in a community where she has never had any social problems or dealt with any counter-arguments to her values or lifestyle. It is only in the wake of the shooting she is forced to engage with possible problems with the structure of community as manifested in her choir. She becomes unable to even articulate the purpose of the choir in this moment:

> I ran a choir that brought together vulnerable people, old people, asylum-seekers, immigrant men, young mums and so on – it was – the idea was – you can imagine.[516]

Claire lives with her female partner, Catriona, who makes yurts; she uses the woods to source localised foraged ingredients for her meals; she runs a community choir. Her depiction of her living environment is telling:

> We lived in a cottage by the sea. Behind the cottage was The Den: old woods on a hill. We gathered mushrooms and blueberries, you know, and wild garlic.
>
> All wild things.[517]

The wildness of the landscape is beautiful and healthy, a source of sustenance and calm: appetising, benign, fruitful, it is imaginatively refashioned like an Eden. This prelapsarian world is reminiscent of Bauman's conception of community as '[...] another name for paradise lost – but one we dearly hope to return, and so we feverishly seek the roads that may bring us there'.[518] Catriona's yurt enterprise suggests something similar: yurts are linked to 'glamorous camping', where people can pay in order to live within nature and in a tent but also have access to electricity and heating. It is an anesthetised version of wildness for a privileged middle class audience. The idea of naturalness and wildness is reframed in order to be easily consumed by Claire and her partner, and Claire's intellectual engagement with the community choir is paralleled with this liberal idealising of the land: it is a safe place where contradiction or critique have not been admitted until the events. The Boy is an example of a real, violent wildness and as such is a violent counter to Claire's world-view.

[516] Greig, *The Events*, p. 14.
[517] Greig, *The Events*, p. 14.
[518] Bauman, *Community*, p. 3.

The use of tea in the play symbolises this tension. A real tea urn is onstage throughout every performance, and at one point the choir members use it to make themselves a hot drink. During the play Claire constant spills tea or is offered tea as a way to calm her. Tea is a symbol of Britishness, and is associated with calm and bonding; it is a mainstay of British hospitality. But as the play unfolds the symbol of tea is deconstructed, most notably in the scene where Claire meets The Boy face to face. It is here that she tries to poison The Boy with tea contaminated with mushrooms picked in the wilderness near her cottage. She lists the mushrooms she picks, naming '[c]hanterelles, wood blewits, saffron milk caps, penny bun ... [l]ovely names'.[519] The names are child-like - the milk caps recall childhood sustenance, the penny bun sounds like a child's sweet, whilst a hint of exoticism creeps in with the 'saffron'. Arguably, this is a rearticulation of Claire's anesthetised version of wildness, paralleled in the lists of the people in her community choir in the final song: child-like, naive, with an innocent exoticism. But the tone then changes. She next picks '[d]estroying angel', cuts up the mushroom, puts it in a teabag and places it in her pocket to give to The Boy.

In the moment when Claire nearly tries to poison The Boy, her innocence is finally rescinded and the tea and the mushrooms are loaded with newly violent connotations. The tea becomes a murder weapon. The moment suggests that the anodyne notion of tea in the popular British imagination is a cultural construct. Tea first came to prominence with the expansion of British imperialism into China, and its British popularity was an important force during the Opium wars.[520] Claire now sees the complexity of her own situation: in trying to kill, she has become like The Boy himself. In this moment, Claire is seen to accept her own propensity for wildness, murder.[521] But it is a moment based on individual action and not one of intersubjectivity with the Other. Claire understands her own character better at this moment, but in this scene of meeting she gains no real insight into the mind of The Boy. The Boy himself seems incapable of understanding the gravity of

[519] Greig, *The Events*, p. 58.
[520] J. Y. Wong, *Deadly Dreams: Opium and the Arrow War (1856-1860) in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
[521] Greig, *The Events*, p. 9.

his situation, and is presented as naive and child-like, in stark contrast to the grotesquely controlling character he appears earlier in the play. He states that he committed the murders because 'I was angry and I had a gun'.[522] Claire is confronted with the unknown and she finally embraces the unknowable, accepting her inability to define or understand it. Her final vision of community seems based in a complex and irresolvable intersubjectivity: she seems to acknowledge the importance of recognizing it is not always possible to understand the Other completely.

This Thing of Darkness, I Acknowledge Mine

The fashioning of Claire's world as innocent and disconnected from the reality of violence and extremism is further created by the use of the metaphor of the island in *The Events*. The play begins with an ethical question posited by The Boy (of whose violent actions the audience are as yet unaware) about the colonisation of Australia. He looks out into the audience and asks them to imagine an Aboriginal boy, an image of innocence implicitly linked to both himself and Claire, watching the first colonisers approach the island of Australia. He states:

> Carried on these ships are class and religion and disease and a multitude of other instruments of objectification and violence all of which are about to be unleashed upon his people.[523]

The Boy who narrates this story appears educated and rational. He likens the English invaders to a completely unknowable Other, their ship is like 'a spacecraft'.[524] The Aboriginal boy of the story knows only 'his tribe, and the tribes beside', which is later explicitly linked to The Boy's own

[522] Greig, *The Events*, p. 62.
[523] Greig, *The Events*, p. 11.
[524] Greig, *The Events*, p. 11.

violence: he state he kills to keep his own 'tribe' safe.[525] The Boy then asks a clear ethical question to the audience about this story:

> If you could go back in time and speak to that boy, what would you say?
>
> You would stand on the rocks and you would point at the ships and you would say – 'Kill them. Kill them all.'[526]

An ethical question is asked of the audience, and as in later scenes The Boy put words in their mouths: he answers for them and advocates violence. It is a moment of propaganda and complicit acceptance from the audience which is then repeated in The Boy's later calls for audience participation. The question is provocative and it usefully crystallises the debates within *The Events*. The 'religion and disease and ... objectification and violence' which the English ships bring to the Australian natives are examples of persecution which Aboriginal descendants still fight against today. But the argument also depends on privileging a fascistic notion of biological purity and separateness which is unethical, untenable and unworkable in a globalised society, and has led to mass genocide and persecution. The question also demonstrates the uneasy dichotomy inherent in social liberalism, displayed through the character of Claire. Claire champions her mixed-race choir who accept anyone who wishes to join. Yet in her fetishisation of wildness as aesthetically beautiful and wholesome she seems to also reproduce a belief in biological purity. Her own space is often described as an island landscape in the text:

> I went up to The Den ...

[525] Greig, *The Events*, pp. 11, 20.
[526] Greig, *The Events*, p. 12.

I saw women from the rowing club out on the boat – water sparkling all around them.

Seals basking out on the rocks by the island.[527]

And later:

There is an island.

Fog on water . . . [528]

Like the Aboriginal boy, Claire herself lives on a kind of island, disconnected from the realities of violence and extremism. The violent assault by The Boy is a parallel of the violent assault by the English on Australia. Claire's ultimate desire is to understand the working of The Boy, and finally to kill him, just as The Boy advocates would have been the correct decision for the audience members. It is only through accepting the fact that The Boy is unknowable, different to how she imagined, that she decides against murder and changes her plans. In the image of the island, Greig and Gray connect the ideology of right-wing nationalism about racial/national purity with the naivety of left-wing togetherness and community based on the possibility of accepting everyone as somehow the same. Both ideas are critiqued unworkable and naive. When Claire interviews a right-wing politician he says to her:

You enjoy exoticism as long as you feel in a dominant position. As long as your tribe are in control. Then it's fine, a hobby. If you felt genuine competition for housing, or resources,

[527] Greig, *The Events*, p. 37.
[528] Greig, *The Events*, p. 41.

> or jobs . . . like most people do . . . you would feel differently. It's not easy to be open to others when your tribe feels weak.[529]

The politician calls out Claire about her own privileged middle-class position disconnected to the threat which others feel, and this feels uncomfortably insightful. However, the threat the politician speaks of is reminiscent of The Boy's imaginings about the Aboriginal boy's fate, where immigration leads only to persecution.

The island metaphor also echoes the atrocity committed by Breivik, who massacred 69 children and adults at a Workers' Youth League summer camp on the island of Utøya in Tyrifjorden, Buskerud. The camp was run by the Norwegian Labour Party and it advocated a kind of togetherness that Breivik opposed. In targeting the island he was specifically targeting ideologies of the left, trying to silence opinions that differed from his own. In *The Events* the right-wing politician says to Claire:

> It's people like you who try to erase difference.[530]

This description of her work, and of the liberal left, sounds tellingly violent. It also could be used as an explanation of Breivik's actions. Again, Claire's ideals of equality in her choir are paralleled with the extreme right-wing ideologies which advocate racial purity and sameness. I am not suggesting here that *The Events* posits Claire's values as similar to The Boy's ultimately fascistic ones. However, I do argue that the play seeks to trouble the potential complacency of liberal 'community', rather than simply reiterate liberal values with the help of 'soaring' community singing, as some of the play's reception has suggested.

[529] Greig, *The Events*, p. 34.
[530] Greig, *The Events*, p. 35.

Greig begins the text of *The Events* with a quotation from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, set on a fictionalised island where all the characters are shipwrecked apart from two natives: Caliban and the spirit Ariel. After enslaving Caliban, Prospero the magician states in the final scene that '[t]his thing of darkness I acknowledge mine.'[531] He pardons an act of sedition by Caliban, whom he has enslaved, and leaves the island. In using this quotation to frame the playtext, Greig highlights Prospero's admission as key to an understanding of the *The Events*. At first glance this quotation can be taken as a simple affirmation of an ideology of community as accepting everyone, a move at the end of *The Tempest* to reject slavery and subjugation and celebrate renewal. According to the Arden Shakespeare editors, these words represent a recognition of Prospero's own part in the darker side of humanity, the wildness within his own character and an implicit pardoning of Caliban's sedition.[532] The quotation recalls the moment in *The Events* when Claire recognises the will to murder within herself as instrumental in her acceptance of the events and her ability to move on. However, in their readings of *The Tempest* as a reflection on the Jacobean colonisation of America, Post-colonial scholars have suggested that there are significant problematic elements in Prospero's statement here.[533] When Prospero calls Caliban a 'thing' of 'darkness', the words demonstrate colonialism's propensity to objectify the colonised, and equate darkness of skin colour with a darkness of character. Just as he admits Caliban as his own he objectifies him as property, simultaneously reinscribing the differences he perceives between himself and the colonised Other. Caliban has never been equal. The quotation is a demonstration of the potential of the coloniser to reproduce inequality whilst seeming to accept the colonised in a fictionalised togetherness. I read the use of this quotation as a reflection of the play's suspicion of ideologies of togetherness and community.

The image of the island also recalls the British Isles and the identity of its people. As a Scottish playwright, the image bring to mind the 2014 Scottish referendum and the public debates

[531] Greig, *The Events*, p. 9.
[532] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. by Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2003), p. 281 n.276.
[533] See for example Bill Ashcroft, *Caliban's Voice: The Transformation of English in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 2009); Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin, *Post-Colonial Shakespeares* (London: Routledge, 2013).

about togetherness and identity occurring during 2013 when Grieg was writing the play. Similarly, the Conservative Party published the first draft of their European Union Referendum Bill in May 2013, which led to debate on the UK's relationship with the rest of the European Union.

Claire and the Other

As I have argued through this thesis, the achievability of inter-subjectivity between self and other simple is consciously interrogated in ATC's work. In all the productions I discuss here, real understanding between human subjects is based on a recognition of difference rather than an erasure of it, an erasure in which the right-wing politician of *The Events* implicates Claire. Claire's self-destructive drive to understand The Boy can be read in parallel with the craving for 'true' love in *Crave* and *Illusions.* Similarly to some of the voices in in *Crave*, Claire describes herself as physically fragmented, not whole. At the moment when The Boy committed the murders she says she felt

> A feeling I've never had before, a feeling of tearing, of something pulling away from its moorings suddenly and in its wake- an overwhelming absence ...
>
> It was my soul leaving my body.[534]

Her relationship with The Boy is obsessive and, at certain moments, sexualised. She can 'see' no other person, whoever she is talking to. Claire states that her understanding of The Boy is important because

> [h]ow can I hate him when I don't understand him?[535]

[534] Greig, *The Events*, p. 15.

And later:

> If he is human I can connect with him.[536]

In order to understand, she must 'connect'; the relationship is only meaningful to her if she is able to fully access what The Boy was thinking. Ironically, this leads to the destruction of her most meaningful relationship, her romantic relationship with her partner Catriona, who tells Claire:

> Claire, at this moment, you can't even connect with me.[537]

Her sexual desire for her partner is redirected towards The Boy. The shamanic ritual she draws upon to help heal the choir ends with her symbolically kissing The Boy in an effort to cure him. She 'takes his soul into her breath' and then kisses him and says 'I place my lips close to his / And release him back into his belonging body.'[538] Claire imagines her body in synthesis with The Boy as the only way to let him 'belong' again; to physically envelop him into her own being. Later she attempts to stop Catriona leaving her by fighting with her (on stage she is fighting with the body of The Boy, as the actor who plays him also plays Catriona). This culminates again with a sexual encounter:

> *The fight is real, strained and slow.*
>
> *Eventually Claire wins.*

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[535] Greig, *The Events*, p. 122.
[536] Greig, *The Events*, p. 39.
[537] Greig, *The Events*, p. 40.
[538] Greig, *The Events*, p. 42.

She kisses the boy.[539]

Most notably she later fanaticises about having sex with The Boy:

I take him into me so gently ...

That he comes back to himself

His soul returns to his body ...

He understands that he is understood.[540]

This moment replays Claire's psycho-sexual drive to heal The Boy through the physical incorporation of sex. This physical incorporation is then connected to a psychological inter-subjectivity: in Claire's fantasy, the act of sex enables The Boy to understand that he is understood, there is a physical and mental exchange. This fantasy reinforces Claire's false belief that a synthesis of self and Other will necessarily result in healing and a sense of belonging, just as the men in *Illusions* idealise a romantic love based on complete exchange.

The Boy is everywhere and nowhere – his face is the one Clair sees throughout the play (and the one the audience sees) but in his glamorised and comedic persona, he can be read as a projection by Claire as she tried to understand him; her attempt to understand tells the audience more about Claire than about him. When she meets him in person, it becomes apparent how different he in reality from her own projections. This is the moment when she decides against her plan to murder him. At this point she understands the drive for destruction within her own self, a discovery about herself rather than an understanding of the Other.

[539] Greig, *The Events*, p. 47.
[540] Greig, *The Events*, p. 53.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have described how *The Events* positions its audiences to affectively experience and intellectually engage with the ideas in the production, in particular its explorations of contemporary community. The dramaturgical techniques I have analysed here are perhaps Gray's most sophisticated; and yet some audience members and critics appeared to read the performance as a simplistic celebration of the unifying power of community in song. The production poses difficult ethical questions without suggesting easy answers: how might a community work in ways which respect and encourage diversity rather than suppress it? How might a respect for diversity go beyond easy platitudes of inclusivity and embrace the awkwardness and difficulty of difference? As in all the productions discussed in this thesis, Gray suggests the importance of understanding the inability to fully know the Other, and the associated importance of maintaining dialogue in the process of communication between different people, cultures, perspectives. As Mouffe suggests, intersubjectivity

> [...] is the very condition of possibility for a pluralist form of human coexistence in which rights can exist *and* be exercised, in which freedom and equality can somehow manage to coexist. [... There is a need to] realize that pluralistic democratic politics consist in pragmatic, precarious and necessarily unstable forms of negotiating its constitutive paradox.[541]

[541] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, pp. 10–11.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have argued that the work directed by Ramin Gray for ATC between 2010 and 2015 can be understood in the light of the critical turn in thinking about 'community'. I have suggested that Gray and ATC's chosen plays, rehearsal processes and productions during this period all stage, trouble and debate a concept of community based on a unified sense of identity, a concept explored by the theorists whose work underpins this thesis. The theorists surveyed here work from the assumption that the idea of a unified community is inherently and problematically romantic, nostalgic and ultimately totalitarian: they argue that a drive to create unity in community can lead to the violent suppression of difference and democratic rights. As Nancy suggests

> ...the thinking of community as essence – is in effect the closure of the political [...] because is assigns to community a *common being*, whereas community is a matter of [...] existence inasmuch as it is *in* common, but without letting itself be absorbed into a common substance.[542]

They argue for difference and dissent in communities, as opposed to attempts to erase difference or render it 'Other': Nancy's 'being-*in*-common' in his inoperative community, Blanchot's unavowable 'negative community' and Agamben's community based on 'singularity' have all been informed my discussion of Gray and ATC's work.[543]

In Chapter One I have marked that critical interrogations of community have been particularly relevant in the past decade as Britain has been locked in a public debate about what might constitute community, identity and Britishness. These debates have been exacerbated

[542] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. xxxiix.
[543] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. xi; Blanchot, p. 13; Agamben, p. 1.

through the rise in immigration and migrant populations in Britain, the financial crash in 2008 coupled with the government's policy of austerity, and the 2016 vote supporting Britain's withdrawal from the European Union and the associated 'Brexit' strategy. I have suggested that the three ATC productions from the period between 2010 and 2015 each privilege difference, dissent and dialogue over unworkable, idealistic and potentially bigoted models of community based on unity of identity. This thesis has aimed to demonstrate that ATC's productions under Gray are essentially 'dialogic'. Sennett suggests that the 'dialogic'

> [...] name[s] a discussion which does not resolve itself by finding common ground. Though no shared agreements may be reached, through the process of exchange people may become more aware of their own views and expand their understanding of one another.[544]

Crucial to my discussions here has also been Mouffe's concept of the 'democratic paradox' which acknowledges that within a liberal democracy perfect liberty and perfect equality can never be achieved. She favours an antagonistic democracy because

> [...] pluralistic democratic politics consist in pragmatic, precarious and necessarily unstable forms of negotiating its constitutive paradox [...] What is specific and valuable about modern liberal democracy is that, when properly understood, it creates a space in which this confrontation is kept open, power relations are always being put into question and no victory can be final.[545]

[544] Sennett, p. 19.
[545] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, p. 11,15.

Using these ideas of the dialogic and the antagonistic, I have argued that rather than providing a simple answer to questions of how contemporary communities might work, the work of Gray and ATC offers an intellectual discussion and, importantly, an affectual experience of the difficulties of the negotiation between the individual and the wider community, both in the moment of live performance and in rehearsal. I have argued that this dynamic, and the audience's consciousness of it, offers an example of how we might navigate the mutable, difficult, changing relations in contemporary communities.

In *The Golden Dragon* I have suggested that the play and production's formal inventiveness, in particular its Brechtian strategies of emphasising the actor's difference from the character played, worked to highlight the difficulties of fully understanding another person. The dramaturgical structures of *The Golden Dragon* both remind the audience of the ethical importance of observing and attempting to engage with the Other in the wider community, whilst at the same time acknowledging the impossibility of ever fully understanding another person.

In my exploration of Sarah Kane's *Crave* and Ivan Viripaev's *Illusions*, I have discussed the meanings produced not only by each play, but by their pairing, and by the change of auditorium configuration between the two halves of the touring production. Each of these plays explore their characters' desires to form intimate relationships with important Others in their lives. The plays staged the drive for unified intersubjective relationships, but suggested that complete exchange with any Other is unobtainable and that attempts to create total unity are destructive. I have suggested that the dramaturgy created by Gray and ATC across the pairing of these plays foregrounded a similar desire for coherence within the spectator. The post-modern text of *Crave*, and ATC's staging, encouraged the ultimately hopeless desire in the audience to create a coherent narrative or meaning in the performance where there is none. I have argued that the change in the audience's seating arrangements after *Crave* was choreographed to make the audience self-

conscious about their efforts to respond in some 'correct' way to the performance, something which I have also connected to a drive for community unity and intersubjectivity.

Finally, in my chapter on *The Events* I have suggested that, again, the critique of community staged in the play was reproduced affectively in the bodies of the spectators. Here, the use of the community choir on stage, with which the audience was invited to sing along, was used to demonstrate the problems inherent in encouraging a unified community where all dissent and difference is erased, whilst the presence of the choir simultaneously testified to the importance of communication and recognition of the Other.

Gray's productions for ATC represent an inventive and idiosyncratic engagement with the issue of community in contemporary Britain. They all exemplify structures which David Greig has suggested are important, in his essay 'Rough Theatre'.[546] As I have recounted, Greig argues for a new kind of theatre which is not based on the 'dialectical solutions' of so-called 'political theatre'.[547] 'Rough Theatre' still has an explicitly progressive agenda, but instead of suggesting specific solutions it offers something 'unfinished', 'imaginative' and reminds one of the 'contingency of things'.[548] Greig's 'rough theatre' takes place in 'rough spaces', it 'would contain music and song', it would be 'performed by amateurs': these are all features of Gray's ATC productions.[549] I have claimed here that ATC's theatre does not argue for a specific political panacea to change the contemporary world; instead it offers the audience an affectual experience which highlights the importance of empathy, listening and negotiation in the theatre and in contemporary communities. Its unfinished and imaginative productions reflect the unfinished and imaginative encounters it stages between subjects within communities.

I have advocated here for the use of community theory as a productive way in to new thinking about contemporary theatre. I have suggested in Chapter One that its underuse in

[546] Greig, 'Rough Theatre'.
[547] Greig, 'Rough Theatre', p. 212.
[548] Greig, 'Rough Theatre', p. 212.
[549] Greig, 'Rough Theatre', p. 212.

contemporary theatre scholarship may be connected with the term's link to parochialism and nostalgia, as some of the community theorists I have cited point out. The idea of community also sits uncomfortably on the nexus between the idea of the political or national, and the self or subject, and therefore requires an understanding of the complexities of both political and identity theory. Community theory critiques a simple binary between the ideas of self and group, and recommends more dynamic structures of identity and community to account for this. I contend that critiques of community offer a particularly productive lens through which to look at live theatre, because in the moment of performance, actors and audience form a temporary community, allowing explorations of a sense of togetherness not available in other art forms.

Dialoguing with Negative Reception

Given my interest in critiques of homogeneity and theories of dissent here, I want finally to use this Conclusion to address something that can be awkward to consider, namely, negative reactions and reception from audiences, particularly reactions which do not conform to my own understanding of the work an ATC production might be doing. This is something I briefly touched upon in my analysis of *The Events*. In a thesis which promotes dialogical communication, I should address some of these responses and will end with a brief discussion of how Gray and the company used them to promote their own dialogical processes.

The Golden Dragon had some very negative reviews. For example, *What's On Stage* said of the play that it that 'lost me completely. I'm really not too sure what the point is'.[550] One Twitter user, with a witty reference to the 'tooth' narrative in the play, said of the production: '#edfringe the

[550] Karen Bussell, 'The Golden Dragon Review', *What's On Stage*, 19 May 2011 <http://www.whatsonstage.com/reviews/theatre/southwest/E8831305908993/Golden+Dragon+(Plymouth).html> [accessed 24 August 2012].

golden dragon : puzzlingly pretentious, ultimately toothless. Miss this'.[551] Responses to *Crave* and *Illusions* were less decisive; almost all reviews and social media exchanges were overwhelmingly positive. However, one ACE Artistic Assessment did suggest that during *Illusions* 'it was almost as if these wonderful actors had run out of steam and it certainly felt as if the audience had also run out of steam as people shifted in their seats and some people snoozed'.[552] Gray states that the tour of *Crave* and *Illusions* did not attract as large an audience as he had wanted. In an interview, he recounted that one of the performances at the Hull Truck was pulled because only two people had booked to see it.[553] Gray took the cast to the pub, and it was there that he decided to change his approach to audience and think more broadly about how to engage local audiences (a decision that finally led to the use of the community choirs on stage in *The Events*). As I have recounted above, *The Events* was widely celebrated and successful, but the reviews and some audience members read the performance very differently to how Gray and ATC had hoped. The reviews suggested that the production offered an uncomplicated sense of the unifying power of community, so that ironically, *The Events* was celebrated for the sense of community it was created to critique. Gray and ATC continue to develop their work dialogically in the light of these responses. Most recently, Gray's production of *Winter Solstice* by Roland Schimmelpfennig, and his next collaboration with David Greig, *The Suppliant Women*, have received ecstatic reviews and a phenomenally positive response on social media. In particular, these responses highlight the way the themes of the productions reflect the current arguments in the British public sphere about community, togetherness and migration. The four plays I have covered have led to the consolidation of a practice which accentuates the relevance of the theatre in discussions about community, migration and the dialogic in the present.

[551] Twitter, @swiftyness 23/08/2011
[552] Lynda Winstanley, 'Crave/Illusions ACE Artistic Assessment', 2012.
[553] 'Interview with Ramin Gray at the ATC Office'.

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